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## Anthropology

NEW SERIES, NO. 10

**"And He Was Beautiful": Contemporary Athapaskan  
Material Culture in the Collections  
of Field Museum of Natural History**

**William E. Simeone**

**James W. VanStone**

**November 28, 1986**  
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## Preface

In 1981 and 1982 Field Museum of Natural History acquired a collection of material items made by Athapaskan Indians living in the villages of Tanacross, Tetlin, Northway, Dot Lake, Eagle, and Minto, in interior Alaska. The purpose of this study is to describe and illustrate this well-documented collection which, we believe, reflects the vigor of contemporary northern Athapaskan material culture and the extent of its roots in the past.

The collecting project began in 1971, when Simeone moved to Tanacross. Initially he began to collect contemporary objects for a personal collection. Then, in 1976, he began a craft business, selling beads, skins, feathers, thread, and other materials to the people in the villages along the Tanana and Copper rivers. Through this business he met craftspeople, examined their work, learned about their marketing systems, and discovered why certain items were being made and what they meant in terms of the culture. Additionally, he learned what kinds of materials people liked and where they obtained some of their ideas for various designs. From this experience it became apparent that contemporary Athapaskan material culture, at least for this area of the subarctic, was vigorous and well-connected with the past, not only in a technological sense but also aesthetically and symbolically. In other words, these craftspeople were not merely making objects using traditional techniques, such as processing and sewing skins; they were also demonstrating continuity in the symbolic and aesthetic values attached to these objects.

In 1980 VanStone asked Simeone if he would be willing to collect for the museum; Simeone agreed. The collection was assembled in two stages. First, readily available items such as birch bark baskets, moccasins, gloves, beaded necklaces, and purses were purchased directly from craftspeople or at local stores. Items purchased at stores were always documented, and in most cases the indi-

viduals who made them were personally known to Simeone. In this manner the nucleus of the collection was completed by the end of the summer of 1981. The second stage of assembly consisted of rounding out the collection with more elaborate items, such as the fur-trimmed chief's coats, a gunho, and dentalium shell pieces. To give additional breadth to the collection, VanStone suggested that Simeone collect various tools used for woodworking and tanning skin. Because these items were difficult to find and people were not willing to sell heirlooms or objects currently in use, they had to be commissioned especially for the collection. This second stage continued through the winter of 1981-1982 and into the following summer. The last items were commissioned during the summer of 1982 and sent to the museum that fall.

Since all the objects in the collection are of native manufacture, it is clear that they represent only a partial view of the contemporary Indian material culture. There are, for example, few objects directly connected with the important subsistence activities of hunting and fishing, since most subsistence is carried out with western manufactured items. In contrast, the potlatch remains the major event in Athapaskan Indian life in which people wear dress and ornament they make themselves, items well represented in the collection.

Traditionally, the Tanana River villages shared a similar culture based on a seasonal subsistence economy and participated in a similar contact situation. These villages, as well as the Han village of Eagle and Ahtna villages on the Copper River, also had kinship connections, and their inhabitants participated together in potlatches. Since the construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942, Indian villages in interior Alaska have developed in similar ways, so that today there is almost a pan-Athapaskan material culture revolving around participation in the potlatch. Some of the most

vital, culturally significant pieces in the collection are associated with the potlatch. Because of cultural similarities and shared historical experiences, we believe the collection described in this study to be representative of Athapaskan material culture for the entire area from about 1900 to the present.

During the initial stages of collecting, several people from Tanacross were consulted as to what should be collected. Additionally, information about the use and meaning of the objects was obtained through participant observation and both

formal and informal interviews in the villages of Tanacross and Dot Lake. Before and during the collecting period Simeone attended a number of potlatches, where he took some of the photographs reproduced here. In addition to collecting the ethnographic objects, Simeone also obtained biographical information about the craftspeople who contributed to the collection. It was only through participation of these people that the collection came into existence or that this study has any value.

# **“And He Was Beautiful”: Contemporary Athapaskan Material Culture in the Collections of Field Museum of Natural History**

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## **Abstract**

The collections of Field Museum of Natural History contain 65 examples of contemporary northern Athapaskan Indian crafts made by the Han, Tanacross, and Upper Tanana Indians. These objects were collected for the museum in 1981–1982 and are described, illustrated, and placed in their historical and contemporary context by this study. The authors demonstrate that contemporary northern Athapaskan material culture, at least in interior Alaska, is vital, innovative, and modern, but with strong ideological and technological roots in the past.

Virtually all the Cordilleran physiographic unit is within the circumpolar boreal forest; the vegetation is primarily coniferous, with white spruce being the most important. In the better-drained areas, poplar stands are characteristic, while in swampy sections black spruce, tamarack, willow, and alder are abundant. Ground cover throughout the entire area is heavy. Grass grows on river banks and on old terraces, in the vicinity of human settlements, and on other cleared areas. Blueberries, cranberries, strawberries, and other edible berries are plentiful. Throughout much of the area during early summer, wild roses, fireweed, Labrador tea, and other common subarctic flora bloom in profusion.

Animals of economic importance to the Indians include the moose, caribou, black and grizzly bear, and various species of fox, as well as the muskrat, beaver, porcupine, hare, marten, lynx, wolverine, otter, fisher, wolf, and red squirrel. Fishing is, of course, an important subsistence activity; the fish most commonly taken are salmon, whitefish, grayling, northern pike, lake trout, suckers, and loche (burbot). Large numbers of ducks appear seasonally, and loons are very common.

## **I. Introduction**

### **The People and the Environment**

The Tanacross, Han, and Upper Tanana Indians, Athapaskan-speaking peoples of interior Alaska whose contemporary material culture is the subject of this study, live along the upper Yukon River and the Tanana, a major tributary of the upper Yukon. The territory of the Tanacross lies between that of the Tanana and Upper Tanana (Krauss, 1974) and is entirely within Alaska, while the territories of the Han and Upper Tanana extend into adjacent Yukon Territory (fig. 1). Most of this vast region falls within a single physiographic unit which has been referred to as the Cordilleran (McClellan, 1970, pp. x–xi), named in recognition of the great mountain chain that runs in a generally north-to-south direction through western British Columbia and the Yukon Territory into Alaska.

### **Historical Background**

Of the three Indian groups, the Han had the earliest direct contact with Europeans—a result of their trading expeditions, first to the Hudson's Bay Company trading posts on the Peel River in the early 1840s and then to Fort Yukon on the Yukon River after it was established in 1847 (Whymper, 1869, p. 254; Dall, 1870, p. 109; Raymond, 1873;

Murray, 1910, pp. 2, 8, 75–76; Osgood, 1971, p. 78). In 1851 Robert Campbell became the first white man to make a trip through Han territory when he traveled from Fort Selkirk, at the junction of the Yukon and Pelly rivers, to Fort Yukon (Campbell, 1958, pp. 110–123; Osgood, 1971, p. 3) (fig. 1).

The earliest contact between Tanacross people and Europeans may have occurred in the mid-1840s when Indians from Mansfield, the settlement formerly occupied by the people who now live in the village of Tanacross, traveled down the Tanana River to Nuklukayet, a trading post at the confluence of the Tanana and Yukon rivers (McKenna, 1959, p. 95; 1981, pp. 566–567). Perhaps even earlier in the century Tanacross Indians went south, over the Alaska Range, to trade with the Russians at the Mednovskiy Trail House, a post situated near the mouth of the Chitna River, a Copper River tributary (Wrangell, 1970, p. 8).

Upper Tanana people probably also used the same trade routes to the mouth of the Tanana and over the Alaska Range to the Mednovskiy Trail House, while those of the Scotty Creek band on the Canadian border may have gone east to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Selkirk for trade. McClellan (1975, pt. 2, p. 509) has noted that “when an independent trader reestablished a trading post at Selkirk in the last decade of the [19th] century, the Upper Tanana . . . began to go there with their furs and to get tea and sugar.”

After the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867, the Alaska Commercial Company acquired the assets of the Russian-American Company and constructed a number of posts at various locations on the Yukon River. In 1873 the company established the first trading post in Han territory at Belle Isle across the river from present-day Eagle. The trader there was Moses Mercier, a former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company (Simeone, 1982, p. 67). A year later, two more Alaska Commercial Company traders, Leroy N. McQuesten and Frank Bonifield, built Fort Reliance on the Yukon, just below the mouth of the Klondike River, near Dawson (Brooks, 1953, pp. 315–316; Simeone, 1982, p. 67). Both trading posts were visited by Han, Tanacross, and Upper Tanana people (Allen, 1887, pp. 76, 80; Wesbrook, 1969).

During the summer of 1885 Upper Tanana and Tanacross people met Lieutenant Henry T. Allen of the U.S. Army as he undertook the first recorded exploration of the Tanana River. He ascended the Copper River, crossed over the Mentasta Moun-

tains through the Suslota Pass into the Tanana River drainage, and floated down the Tanana. Along the way his party stopped at two Upper Tanana villages, Nandell's and Tetling's, and one Tanacross settlement, Kheeltat, which Allen named after its headman (Allen, 1887, pp. 35–87).

When gold was discovered on the Forty-mile River in 1886, McQuesten and Arthur Harper built a post at its mouth. They were joined a year later by Bishop William Bompas, who established the first Anglican mission in Han territory (Crow & Obley, 1981, p. 511). During the following nine years, gold was discovered along the Yukon from Birch Creek to Mission Creek, site of present-day Eagle (Simeone, 1982, p. 71). Each successive discovery lured more and more prospectors into the area, but they were a trickle compared to the human deluge which was to follow the Klondike River strike in the summer of 1896.

By the winter of 1898–1899, between 20,000 and 30,000 people were encamped around Dawson, in the heart of Han country; Eagle had a population of 1,000 (Crow & Obley, 1981, p. 510). Gold seekers came from various directions: up the Yukon River in boats from St. Michael; over the Rocky Mountains from the Mackenzie drainage; over the Chilkoot Pass; and up the Copper River, through Mentasta Pass into Tanacross and Upper Tanana territories (McKenna, 1981, p. 567).

Although Tanacross and Upper Tanana people encountered many gold seekers, they were transients and, unlike the more sedentary populations of Dawson and Eagle in Han territory, did not present much of a disruptive influence. In 1913, however, a short-lived gold strike occurred on the Chisana River in Upper Tanana territory. The Chisana gold fields were particularly difficult to supply, so the miners lived off the land. It has been estimated that during the winter of 1913–1914 miners killed 2,000 mountain sheep within a 20 mile radius and, by constant hunting, also greatly reduced the number of caribou (Capps, 1916, p. 21). This wholesale slaughter forced the Indians to alter their subsistence strategies. The presence of miners, however, facilitated access to trade goods. By 1920 the Chisana mining camp had been all but abandoned and by 1929 the last trader had died, forcing the Indians to trade at a post located at the mouth of the Slana River, in Ahtna territory (McKenna, 1959, p. 26).

At the turn of the century the U.S. Army began construction of a telegraph line which ran through Tanacross territory, crossing the Tanana River at a place called Tanana Crossing, near the present

village of Tanacross. The line continued northward, past the now abandoned village of Ketchumstuck, and then forked, one branch going west to Fairbanks and the other to the military post at Eagle. The direct impact of the line was brief, however, since by 1915 the greater part was abandoned and by 1926 only 11 miles remained (Simeone, 1982, p. 77).

In 1912 the Protestant Episcopal Church purchased the telegraph installation at Tanana Crossing and established St. Timothy's mission. The first missionaries found the Indians scattered in small camps, with the nearest seasonal village located at Lake Mansfield seven miles away (Wright, 1925, p. 173). By 1922 the missionaries had persuaded about 100 Indians from various villages to build cabins around the mission, although they were probably only seasonally occupied. When Robert A. McKennan visited the mission during the winter of 1929–1930, he found most of the people had moved away (McKennan, 1959, p. 25). By the mid-1930s, however, the Mansfield people apparently began to live around the mission on a more permanent basis, growing gardens and accepting occasional summer jobs from the local traders and missionaries. The traders paid in cash, which enabled people to purchase supplies, while the missionaries exchanged clothing for labor and meat.

Until 1941 the upper Tanana River region was one of the most inaccessible in all Alaska. Because of rapids in the Tanana River near the mouth of the Johnson River, boat traffic to the upper river was limited. The only contact with outsiders was with itinerant traders, resident missionaries, and, later, airplane pilots. Tanacross people saw their first airplane in the winter of 1927, when the pioneer pilot Ben Eielson landed his plane on the river in front of the village. Beginning in 1935, Pan American Airways began a regular service to the village of Tanacross using a hand-cleared strip located across the river from the settlement (Simeone, 1982, p. 103).

In 1942 the U.S. Army pushed a road through northern British Columbia, the Yukon Territory, and into Alaska, penetrating the Upper Tanana and Tanacross territories. That road, the Alaska Highway, has played an extremely important role in the acculturation of the people. It increased the mobility of the Indians, focused their attention away from the traditional subsistence-based lifestyle which had already begun to erode in response to previous contact, and spelled the end of the Upper Tanana and Tanacross bands as social units

(Pitts, 1972, p. 194). Further changes came about in 1958, following Alaska's statehood, when the enforcement of fish and game laws "sounded the death knell to the old pattern of living off the land" (McKennan, 1981, p. 567).

Tanana Crossing, called Tanacross after 1932, was still located at the site of the mission; all the people remaining at Mansfield and Ketchumstuck had settled there. The people who had inhabited the Chisana and Nabesna river basins settled in the village of Northway in the 1940s and early 1950s, while the Tetlin people remained in one of their traditional villages on the Tetlin River. Healy Lake village was abandoned for a while, the people moving in the 1940s and 1950s to new villages like Dot Lake and Tok (fig. 2). Through these changes, Indian life continued to function and the potlatch in particular flourished, increasing in magnitude if not in importance.

### Traditional Material Culture, 1847–1867

During the 19th century the Yukon River was the principal artery of exploration and trade in interior Alaska. What early information exists concerning traditional Athapaskan material culture comes from people who traveled and worked on the river. There is little information before 1929–1930 concerning the traditional material culture of the Upper Tanana and Tanacross people.

In the summer of 1847 Alexander H. Murray, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, began the construction of Fort Yukon near the confluence of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers. From this vantage point he observed Athapaskan Indians who visited the new fort. His observations, enhanced by detailed drawings, provide a great deal of information about the appearance of the people: how they dressed, adorned themselves, carried their equipment, and danced.

A number of different Athapaskan groups came to Fort Yukon to trade, including the Gwich'in, or "Kootchin" as Murray called them; and the Han, or "Gens du fou" as they were known among the traders, referred to by Murray (1910, pp. 82–83; cf. Krech, 1978, p. 96) as the "Han-Kootchin." According to the trader, all the Indians who traded at the fort dressed in more or less the same way, "the only difference being in the fashion of wearing the hair and some of their ornaments" (Murray, 1910, p. 84).

One year after Murray established Fort Yukon,

Robert Campbell, another Hudson's Bay Company trader, made contact with the northern Tutchone people, neighbors to the east of the Han and Upper Tanana, at the confluence of the Yukon and Pelly rivers. There, in 1848, he built Fort Selkirk, which was later destroyed by the Chilkat Tlingit. In June 1851, as previously noted, Campbell left Fort Selkirk after having spent three winters there and traveled down the Yukon on a journey of exploration. On this trip he encountered a number of Indian groups, including the Han (Campbell, 1958, pp. 110–123).

The establishment of these Hudson's Bay Company posts, especially Fort Yukon, shifted the center of trade into eastern Alaska, accelerating changes in many aspects of Indian life but especially in material culture. Consequently by 1867, when Frederick Whymper and William Healy Dall, members of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition, traveled up the Yukon from Nulato to Fort Yukon, Indian clothing and personal adornment had begun to change. Changes in material culture, however, were more prevalent among those Athapaskans trading directly with the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Yukon. The Koyukon, inhabitants of the Koyukuk and middle Yukon rivers, and especially the Tanana River people, still dressed in aboriginal styles.

CLOTHING—At Fort Yukon in 1847 both men and women wore shirts or tunics of “deer skin”; a man’s shirt was pointed in front and back while a woman’s, pointed only in back, was a little longer than a man’s. Beads seem to have been the major form of decoration, although Murray does mention that poor people decorated their pants with porcupine quills, which were also wound around skin tassels hanging from the back of the shirt. A “broad band of beads” in “every shape” was worn across the breast and shoulders of the shirt and sometimes “immense rolls of all colors for necklaces” were seen (Murray, 1910, pp. 84–85). A woman’s costume had fewer decorations, but was adorned in much the same fashion as is indicated in Murray’s drawing (1910, opp. p. 82).

In addition to beads, a man’s costume, particularly those of the Han, was decorated with “brass trinkets” which were apparently obtained from Russian trading posts in southwestern Alaska (Murray, 1910, p. 60). Also indicated in Murray’s drawings (1910, opp. pp. 90, 94) but not mentioned in the text are arm bands of various materials, either sewn directly to the shirt or tied on. In Murray’s drawing of the “Kootcha-Kootchin”

(opp. p. 90), an arm band is rendered with geometric designs which may be quill work.

The “neather garment” for both sexes was a pair of trousers with attached moccasins, decorated with a strip of beads “about two inches broad” on each side “from the hip to the ankle” (Murray, 1910, p. 84). Bands of beadwork were secured around the ankle and legs, the vertical strips on the legs consisting of alternate squares of red and white. Frequently “single fringes” were also used to decorate trousers. It is not clear whether the clothes Murray described were “dress clothes,” which he noted “are always carried with them and put on at night whether here or in their own lodge” (Murray, 1910, p. 85). Winter clothing, probably less heavily beaded, was similar to that worn in summer, except that it included “a rabbit skin capot” along with “deer [caribou] skin trousers dressed with the hair on; the hair is always worn next to the skin” (Murray, 1910, p. 85). Mittens were apparently carried winter and summer and, according to Murray (1910, p. 85), were “ornamental with them; they even have them fixed to some of their guns.”

Robert Campbell described Han clothing made either of moose or caribou skin. The shirt was pulled on over the head and came to a point at the back and front hems. Decoration consisted of beads and porcupine quills. Other types of decoration included “ermine or squirrel skins or tails, ducks’ wings, long hair, &c.” (Wilson, 1970, p. 113).

In 1866 Frederick Whymper described Koyukon shirts as “a double-tailed coat, one tail before, and one behind” (Whymper, 1869, p. 204). He observed that this style, “with various modifications, is adopted by other tribes on the upper Yukon . . .” (Whymper, 1869, p. 204). Dall (1870) also described Koyukon male dress, adding more details. Moccasin-trousers were decorated with bands of black and white beads running down the front of the leg from the thigh to the ankle. At the ankle the band bifurcated “and the two ends, after reaching the sides of the foot, continue all around its edge, except over the heel” (Dall, 1870, pp. 82–83). In addition, a small band of beads was worn around the leg at the knee. Men also wore a “deer-skin” shirt without a hood, “long and pointed before and behind.” A broad band of beadwork decorated the shirt across the breast and back and over the shoulder, “with fringes on the pointed ends, and a few short tails of beadwork in front and on the sleeves” (Dall, 1870, p. 83).

At Nuklukayet, Whymper and Dall encountered “the Tananas,” who were dressed in “double-tailed coats and pantaloons of buckskin [caribou or moose skin], much adorned with fringes [and] beads . . .” (Whymper, 1869, p. 239).

At Fort Yukon the expedition encountered more Tanana River people, whom Dall described as they approached the fort in their canoes: “On going to the beach, some twenty-five single canoes were seen approaching. The occupants kept perfect time with their paddles, advancing in three platoons, and passed over the water as swiftly and beautifully as a flock of ducks” (Dall, 1870, p. 107). They were all dressed in “pointed parkies” and breeches smeared with red ocher, “ornamented in the same manner with beads or quills as the dress of the male Koyukuns . . .” (Dall, 1870, p. 108).

In summary, it can be said that the basic clothing of the upper Yukon and Tanana river Indians and their neighbors consisted of a skin shirt or tunic pointed front and back for men and possibly also for women, with quilled and/or beaded decorative bands extending across the chest and usually across the back as well, and a fringed lower edge. A woman’s tunic tended to be longer than a man’s. Moccasin-trousers were worn by both men and women; decoration consisted of bands of beads or quills around the knee and down the front, with bifurcations at the insteps which joined bands running around the ankles. Winter and summer clothing were the same, except that for winter wear caribou and moose skins were prepared with the hair on. Examples of traditional Athapaskan clothing in the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Leningrad, and Field Museum of Natural History have been described, respectively, by Siebert (1967, 1980) and VanStone (1981).

**ACCOUITEMENTS**—Skin cases decorated with tassles were used to protect firearms, as Murray’s drawing (1910, opp. p. 94) indicates. Quivers were “worn on the left side by a string around the shoulders” (Murray, 1910, p. 85) and, according to the same drawing (opp. p. 94), were also decorated with fringes. Other weapons included knives “made of iron, but the fancy handles and fluted blades are of more value to them than the temper of the knife; they complain of ours [Hudson’s Bay Company] being too hard and the difficulty of sharpening them” (Murray, 1910, p. 85). Two of Murray’s drawings (opp. pp. 90, 94) illustrate a knife being carried at the waist. A spear was also used but is not illustrated.

Whymper noted that both the Koyukon at “Newicargut,” on the Yukon at the mouth of the Nowitna River, and the Tanana River people he saw at Nuklukayet had “elaborately-worked fire-bags, knife-sheaths and belts” (Whymper, 1869, pp. 230, 239). He supplemented this information with a drawing (p. 230) illustrating a bag, knife sheath, knife, and a pair of mittens; except for the knife, all are beaded. Quivers, mittens, a pouch, and knife sheaths decorated with beads and quills and made by Yukon River Indians are described and illustrated by VanStone (1981, pp. 21–22, figs. 45, 51–56).

Dall added information about different types of necklaces he observed at Nuklukayet: these were made of “bears’ claws and teeth, sable tails, wolf ears, bands of beads and dentalia, embroidery of dyed porcupine quills, small ermine skins, hawk and eagle feathers, beavers’ teeth (with which they whet their knives), and the green scalps of the mallard” (1870, p. 95). Dall also described “hoops of birchwood around the neck and wrists, with various patterns and figures cut on them,” which were emblems of mourning for the dead (1870, p. 95).

**PERSONAL ADORNMENT**—Painting of the face, piercing the septum of the nose and lobes and helix of the ears, and arranging the hair were customary among Indians of the upper Yukon and Tanana rivers. According to Murray (1910, p. 85), “each man has hanging to his neck two small bags containing black lead and red earth for the painting of themselves (their faces), each one paints according to his own fancy; most commonly the upper parts of the cheeks and around the eyes are black, [with] a black strip along the top of the nose; the forehead is covered with narrow red stripes, and the chin with strips of red and black.”

Among the Indians Dall encountered at Nuklukayet in 1867, face painting was done with blacking, “obtained by rubbing charcoal and fat together [and] vermillion [which] is purchased of the traders, and supplies the place of the red oxide of iron which they formerly used” (Dall, 1870, p. 94). The Indians also used “micaceous oxide of iron” (p. 95), which may have served for drawing lines on the face.

Farther up the Tanana River, both men and women of the Goodpaster River area painted their faces with red ocher during a potlatch. The men made two long streaks below each eye, “clear across the nose to their ears, and besides this they put streaks on both sides of their nose up and down.

The women could only wear red rouge [ocher] across their forehead and just on the bridge of their nose" (Anderson, 1956, p. 3).

At Fort Yukon every Indian "wears [dentalium shells] as nose and ear ornaments," Murray wrote (1910, p. 94). In several of his drawings he indicates that holes were made in the lobe and helix of the ear, from which were hung what appear to be beads and dentalium shells.

Both Whymper (1869, p. 238) and Dall reported that Tanana River people wore dentalium shells as nose ornaments, but that among the Koyukon living around the trading post at Nulato on the Yukon only the women wore nose ornaments; at Nuklukayet both sexes wore them (Dall, 1870, p. 94). Dall illustrated (p. 95) a nose ornament made of four dentalium shells and two beads.

On the middle Tanana, dentalium shells were worn in big wide collars around the neck and in long earrings hanging "clear down to their shoulders and even longer sometimes" (Anderson, 1956, p. 2). The leading man wore neckpieces "with beads [dentalium shells?] just solid and a big, big breast plate all over beads, and he was beautiful. He had, too, a knife-case covered with wampum [dentalium shells] and both of these . . . had little eagle feathers all around the edge" (1956, p. 2).

**HAIRSTYLES**—The Han and "lower Indians" mixed into their hair "red earth [ocher], grease and the down of geese and ducks; by continuing this from their infancy the *tail* attains an immense length, often as large as the head, and becomes so heavy loaded as it is with beads and shells and accumulated dirt, that the neck is bent forward, and gives the Indians the appearance of stooping" (Murray, 1910, p. 85). The "tail" appears to have been gathered by a band of dentalium shells and beads, and a headband of the same material was worn around the head (Murray, 1910, opp. pp. 89, 90). Murray observed among the Indians mentioned above that "eagle and hawk feathers are stuck in the hair behind, and removed only when they go to sleep or to be used when dancing" (1910, p. 85).

Murray's comments on and illustrations of Indian hairstyles at Fort Yukon are discussed by Richard Slobodin (1981). He believed that well-groomed hair, that is, shiny hair dressed with grease and ornamented with a band of shells, was a sign of high status (Slobodin, 1981, p. 34). He did not believe, however, that all Gwich'in wore their hair in the manner described by Murray; rather, this styling was confined to persons with "pretensions to correctness." Although the Gwich'in discarded

their aboriginal hairstyles by the 1880s, they retained a "high valuation of well-kept, smooth, and shiny hair" (Slobodin, 1981, p. 35).

Whymper (1869, p. 239) wrote that Tanana hairstyles consisted of long hair with "patches of red clay at the back of their heads covered with small fluffy feathers. . . ." Dall (1870, p. 108) added more graphic details in his description of Tanana hairstyles observed at Fort Yukon.

The most striking peculiarity about them [the Tanana River people] was their method of dressing their hair. Allowed to grow to its full length, and parted in the middle, each lock was smeared with a mixture of grease and red ochre. These then presented the appearance of compressed cylinders of red mud about the size of the finger. This enormous load, weighing in some of the adults at least fifteen pounds, is gathered in behind the head by a fillet of dentalium shells. A much smaller bunch hangs on each side of the face. The whole is then powdered with swan's-down, cut up finely, so that it adheres to the hair . . . .

### Changing Styles, 1867–1930

Changes in clothing styles and decoration began well before direct contact with Europeans. The eastern Kutchin, for example, had received Russian trade goods through various Alaskan middlemen by 1837, and Euro-Canadian goods from Mackenzie drainage posts as early as the beginning of the 19th century (Krech, 1976, pp. 217–218). These changes accelerated as Athapaskans came into direct contact with whites, first with traders and later with miners and missionaries. By the beginning of the 20th century most traditional clothing had been replaced with a variety of new styles, some of which incorporated traditional aesthetics and values with new materials. In some instances, however, traditional styles persisted well into the 20th century, and those derived from the early contact period continue to be worn today during potlatches.

When Alexander Murray arrived on the banks of the Yukon River, the Indians he met were of the opinion that their traditional clothing was "superior to ours both in beauty and durability . . ." (Murray, 1910, p. 56). But, even at that time, the Indians were already using a great quantity of glass beads to decorate clothing. In addition to "fancy beads, that is blue and red of various sizes . . . "

(Murray, 1910, p. 94), dentalium shells, which Murray believed to be the most valuable item in the trade, were worn by every Indian as nose and ear ornaments as well as for headbands. And “except cloth and capots which can only be disposed of when there is nothing else, cloth even not then, everything else can be traded here, some brass armbands and neck ornaments, medals and larger sized ear rings, [and] some fancy handled knives” (Murray, 1910, pp. 94–95). Before Murray left Fort Yukon, however, he specifically noted that the Han “seem very fond of our capots, they have promised to come in the fall for some of them . . . white is the colour always demanded, also blankets [possibly for potlatches], powder horns, files, axes, etc. . . and plenty of ammunition and tobacco” (Murray, 1910, p. 100).

The Hudson’s Bay Company, through its tradition of giving a “Chief’s Coat” to helpful local leaders (Murray, 1910, p. 59), also introduced a style of coat decorated with beaded panels and trimmed with fur which is still worn today in a number of Athapaskan communities (Simeone, 1983, p. 63).

Twenty years after Murray, when Whymper and Dall were traveling on the Yukon, clothing styles for those people living closest to the trading stations had undergone considerable change. At Nuklukayet Dall observed a “tyone,” or leader, probably a Koyukon, who “wore an English hunting-shirt of red flannel, ornamented on the shoulders with large pearl buttons, and fringes of moose-skin. He wore moccasins, and mooseskin trousers cut in the English fashion, with fringes down the outside of the leg, and blue leggings tied with a band of beadwork below the knee.” The man’s hair was cut “straight around the neck, and parted a little on one side” (Dall, 1870, p. 94).

Farther up the river, Dall and his party encountered a group of “Kutch’ Kutchin’,” all wearing clothing obtained at Fort Yukon. One of the women wore a calico dress and the men wore “Hudson’s Bay moccasins, leggings, [and] fringed hunting-shirts of buckskin, originally introduced by the English traders, who obtained them from the tribes to the southeast. They had abundance of the fine bead-work in which the French Canadians delight, and which those women who frequent the forts learn to excel in” (Dall, 1870, p. 101).

Very similar styles of dress, described by Murray, Whymper, and Dall, appear in three photographs taken by Edward William Nelson sometime between 1877 and 1881; they are of Atha-

paskans visiting St. Michael on the Bering Sea coast. After a year of trading along the Yukon, traders would occasionally return to St. Michael with a “crew of Indians . . . all dressed in their best clothes and ready for a holiday on the coast while awaiting the arrival of the supply ship” (VanStone, 1979, p. 114; see also Nelson, 1887, p. 13). The men in these photographs appear to be dressed in their best clothes, which range from the traditional (fig. 3) to more modern garments (figs. 4–5).

Figure 3 shows a traditional form of dress very similar to that described by Murray, Whymper, and Dall. The man’s cheeks are painted, indicating that face painting had not disappeared even at this late date. The men in Figure 4, on the other hand, display a more modern look. The man on the left wears a “tin hat,” a Victorian style smoking hat popular with the Gwich’in in the late 19th century (Duncan, 1984, p. 15). Both men wear what appear to be chief’s coats decorated with buttons, fur, cloth, and, on the man at the right, quill-wrapped fringes. This man also wears trousers decorated with beadwork, and moccasins similar to those described in this study. His knife is suspended from a belt slung around his body. In Figure 5 we see the “hunting shirts” described by Dall and Whymper.

Nelson’s photographs show the transition of dress which took place prior to the intensive contact generated by the discovery of gold on the upper Yukon in 1886. At the height of this period, 1898–1900, when the transition was complete, Han men living around Dawson City wore bright mackinaw coats and blanket trousers, stuffed into the tops of moccasins similar to those in Field Museum’s collection (figs. 35a, 36a) (Adney, 1900, p. 505). Hunters continued to use beaded shell bags, knife cases, and gun cases, which had become popular in the mid-19th century. According to Adney (1900, p. 505), the old men “who cling tenaciously to old customs” wore moccasin-trousers and shirts of plaited rabbit skin. Women, when indoors, wore cloth dresses, but outdoors they wore either a blanket coat or a “voluminous over-dress of caribou skin having a hood, which upon occasion may be hauled over the head, but in which commonly reposes the baby” (Adney, 1900, p. 505). Girls dressed like their mothers, while young boys wore moccasin-trousers and caribou skin parkas with hoods made from the scalps of young caribou decorated with beaded cloth tassels (Adney, 1900, p. 506).

By 1885, when Lieutenant Allen encountered

the Upper Tanana and Tanacross people, they had begun to wear trade clothing. Allen noted that the people had "almost entirely ceased to wear nose-rings, and only a few wore ornaments in their ears" (1887, p. 136). He also observed that Tanana River people had more "beadwork and are perhaps more skilled in its manufacture than any other people seen by us in the Territory" (Allen, 1887, p. 138). Allen (1887, opp. p. 79) photographed the Tanacross-speaking headman Kheeltat, his brother, and son, all dressed in their best clothes (fig. 6). They are wearing heavily beaded shot pouches similar to those illustrated by Adney (1900, p. 504) and seen on the man in Figure 3. The hats worn by two of the men in the Allen photograph are similar to the one worn by the man on the right in Figure 4.

As photographs taken by missionaries and the ethnographic descriptions of McKennan (1959) show, old-style clothes, long skin tunics, and moccasin-trousers had gone out of style along the upper Tanana River well before 1912. Missionaries, importing quantities of clothing, exchanged pants, shirts, skirts, and socks for labor and meat. Old people and children, however, continued to wear old-style winter clothing such as caribou skin pull-overs and moccasin-trousers. By the 1940s these too had been replaced with cloth garments.

It is clear that changes in material culture began early in interior Alaska, and that the Indians quickly abandoned the feelings of superiority noted by Murray concerning their traditional clothing. In fact, clothing changed more rapidly than other items of material culture. This change possibly resulted from the Indians' desire to identify with the white man through similar dress; on the other hand, ready-made European garments saved work and were, in most cases, more comfortable to wear (Osgood, 1971, p. 131).

In any event, by the early 20th century aboriginal clothing styles had virtually disappeared, and Indians in many Yukon valley communities greatly desired cheap commercial clothing, including shoes, hats, and stockings. Around white settlements in particular, there was a rapidly increasing trade in brightly colored skirts for women and shirts and neckties for men. At least one observer in the first decade of this century believed that most of the manufactured clothing offered to the Indians was cheap and shoddy (Stuck, 1917, p. 361). The Upper Tanana, however, were still wearing moccasin-trousers in the early 1930s (McKennan, 1959, p. 79).

It should not be surprising that the Indians ap-

preciated the special qualities of wool—warm, lightweight, washable—as opposed to tanned caribou or moose skin, which is heavy and absorbent. Brightly colored fabrics also had appeal, as did canvas and drilling, which could be cut easily and sewn into a variety of garments. With the introduction of these new materials, the ordinary family could afford to have several changes of clothing, perhaps for the first time.

The apparently rapid disappearance of aboriginal clothing styles should not be allowed to obscure the fact that traditional or modified-traditional designs and decorative elements were retained as part of the cultural heritage. The items of material culture described and illustrated in this study demonstrate the tenacity with which traditional concepts of design and ornamentation were retained, even after the introduction of new materials and styles.

## II. The Modern Context

### Introduction

Modern Athapaskan culture, though rooted in the past, has developed around a new set of circumstances. Today, all northern Athapaskans live in permanent villages. Like most people elsewhere, the adults go to work while their children attend school. Clothing is similar to that seen in any American community. Athapaskans now watch television, drive automobiles, and play bingo. Yet some traditions thrive: on the Tanana and Copper rivers, the potlatch is still the most important social and spiritual event in the culture; hunting and trapping also continue to be important; and wild or country foods such as moose and fish are still preferred over store-bought.

Many of the items described in this study reflect the Athapaskans' past, while others emphasize their modern culture. Objects associated with the potlatch, either as dance costumes, regalia worn during the ritual distribution of gifts, or as actual gifts, are the most vital. They stress and symbolize cultural values understood only by the Indians themselves and are directly associated with historic Athapaskan culture. Yet, in economic terms, almost all of these objects have articulated with our money-based economy because all are made for sale. The craft business is an important contem-

porary native activity, but equally important is the fact that the objects express Athapaskan identity to the outside world.

Viewed as internal symbols, objects mark differences between individuals based on achievement and gender. Achievement in Athapaskan society is based on the ability to provide oneself and dependents with a good living and to make potlatches. This achievement is marked by ritual clothing worn at potlatches, such as a chief's coat, a dentalium shell necklace, or a bandolier of either dentalium shells, beads, or buttons. These are symbols of "strong people," powerful both spiritually and politically and rich in material goods. Clothing, however, not only symbolizes relationships between the living but also between the living and the dead. By wearing special clothing, a person signals personal and ancestral accomplishments, thus honoring self and ancestors at the same time.

Although both men and women wear beadwork and women use tools made by men, production is based on gender. Only women sew beads and skins and work with birch bark, while only men work with bone, metal, and wood. This division has economic implications in the contemporary culture. The production of crafts is an important source of income for many families and involves, to an overwhelming extent, the sale of such beaded items as slippers, bags, hair ornaments, necklaces, and birch bark baskets, all made by women. Consequently the craft business is a source of income controlled primarily by women.

The business of production for sale is not only economic. Objects sold as crafts can also be viewed as symbols signifying relationships between cultures. The objects are material representations of the identity which has developed over time as Athapaskans came into contact with a variety of peoples, such as the Tlingit and Euro-Americans. During the historic period, for example, the Chilkat and Yakutat Tlingit actively traded for decorated Athapaskan clothing, which signified social relations based on trade and clan affiliation (de Laguna, 1972, pt. 1, pp. 213-214, 350; McClellan, 1964, pp. 7-8, 1975, pt. 2, pp. 505-506). During the gold rush the sale of moccasins, mittens, and beaded bags became an important point of cultural and economic articulation between Athapaskans and Euro-Americans (VanStone, 1979, p. 183) which has continued to the present. By selling products of local manufacture, Athapaskans enter into social relations with Euro-Americans based on production and consumption. In these rela-

tionships the Indians are able to assert a cultural identity accepted by Euro-American society. Beaded slippers with beaver fur trim, heavily beaded baby straps, bows and arrows, and most other items in the Field Museum collection have been accepted by both Euro-Americans and Athapaskans as symbols of Athapaskan identity.

### The Contemporary Village

Although each village in the Tanana River valley has its own distinctive atmosphere and traditions, decades of contact with Euro-American society have created similarities. Consequently, the description presented here can be applied generally to all villages along the Tanana River but more specifically to the village of Tanacross, where Simeone has resided at intervals for the past 12 years.

One conspicuous feature of all the villages is the physical setting. On the upper Tanana River, for example, the flanks of the massive Alaska Range sweep down into the valley from the south. The valley is dominated by the river, which is fed by numerous mountain torrents and clear water streams flowing out of lakes located on the north side of the valley. Behind the lakes are the Tanana uplands, high, forested hills separating the Tanana from the Yukon River. Everywhere there is forest—miles of deep green spruce, cottonwood and, on higher ground, birch trees.

All the villages in the Tanana River valley, with the exception of Healy Lake, are accessible by road, although Tetlin can be reached overland only in winter. Most village homes are of frame construction, although some are of logs, and many have all the modern conveniences. In Tanacross the houses are located around the outside of a large central square. Each house has a short front yard in which cars are parked, and a deep backyard where dog teams are kept. A steam bath, wood yard, a variety of caches and other outbuildings, frames for tanning skin, boats, motors and snow machines are also found in the rear. The central square is occupied by buildings which every village has, the community hall, where potlatches and other social events are held, and a church. Another ubiquitous building is the state school, which has usually been rebuilt within the last 10 years to replace old Bureau of Indian Affairs schools.

In the majority of villages the availability of nonseasonal, permanent jobs is limited. A few res-

idents are full-time teachers, but more commonly they are teachers' aides, janitors, cooks, or cultural resource persons teaching the Athapaskan language and other native skills. Additional sources of village employment include postmaster, alcoholism counselor, and Headstart teacher. For the Tanacross people, whose village is within commuting distance of Tok Junction, the regional administrative center, there is also a chance for full-time employment outside the village. The Tanana Chiefs Conference, the nonprofit social service arm of Doyon Corporation, has its regional offices in Tok Junction, where a number of Tanacross people work in various capacities. For people who work outside the village, free time is limited to vacations and weekends. For the majority of village people, however, a change in season means a change in activity.

In all villages, almost everyone is involved in the traditional activities of hunting and fishing. Because hunting is regulated by the state, it is limited legally to particular seasons of the year. Fishing, on the other hand, is less regulated and therefore still conducted during the traditional summer periods and in the traditional manner, with fish weir and dip net. Another important summer activity is the preparing of skins for crafts production.

Summer is not only ideal for putting on a potlatch, as the days are 24 hours long and traveling is less hazardous, but it is also an important time of the year for earning cash. Of all seasonal wage labor, fire fighting has taken on a semitraditional quality because it has been a consistent means of earning cash for several decades. Construction work, at different times, has also been an important part of the seasonal economy.

Fall is the season for moose hunting, which lasts, legally, for about two weeks at the end of August and into the beginning of September. Also during these final days of warm weather, with the children in school, parents go off to pick blueberries and cranberries. By the end of October cold weather sets in and winter, with its own set of activities, begins.

Winter cold slows the pace of the village. People spend more time indoors, visiting, watching movies on videotape machines, playing bingo, sewing, reading, listening to tape recordings of potlatch songs, and doing scores of daily chores. Outdoor activities include hauling wood, training dog teams, and trapping. The intensity of trapping varies according to the particular village. In Tanacross a few men trap more or less full time, while others

trap for recreation or as an alternative to wage labor when it is not available. None of the trappers spends more than one day away from the village. Tetlin people, on the other hand, probably trap more because the trapping areas are more accessible and there are fewer winter jobs available. Yet, regardless of the local situation, trapping is considered traditional work. All the men and many of the women possess knowledge about trapping and obtaining a living off the land.

Of all the winter chores, hauling wood is the most constant. In a village such as Tanacross, which moved in 1974–1975 to a new location, there is an abundance of wood in the immediate vicinity, and people cut trees almost in their own backyards. Nevertheless, many old people and those with permanent winter employment purchase wood. Around village sites occupied over long periods of time, such as the old village of Tanacross, or Tetlin, or Northway, wood is a relatively scarce commodity; one must either purchase it or travel a long way to cut it.

In the 1950s the snow machine replaced dogs for work in the bush. Dog teams have had a recent resurgence in popularity, however, due to the success of a number of Athapaskan dogsled racers, such as George Atlla. Consequently more people are raising dogs, either for racing or for breeding purposes. Good dogs—animals with known blood lines—bring high prices.

For the dark months of November, December, and January, the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas are focal points around which the community draws together to celebrate. On Christmas Eve there is often a school play in the community hall, a church service, and, at midnight, a stroll around the village, during which participants stop at each house to sing Christmas carols in their native language and in English. On the following afternoon, the whole village often puts on a feast, for themselves and for people visiting from other villages.

The first months of the new year are usually the coldest, the temperature sometimes hovering around  $-60^{\circ}$  F for weeks at a time. This intense cold keeps everyone close to the village except for those going to school or work. From January until late March or April the life of the village is fairly quiet, except during the annual dogsled racing events which take place first in Anchorage, then Fairbanks, and finally Tok Junction. Many Tanana River people travel to these large towns for a weekend of racing, visiting and a general good time, which relieves the doldrums of winter. For

the Upper Tanana and Tanacross people, the Tok Junction event is particularly important: local people participate, and everyone who could not get to the other races can get to this one.

By late April and May the weather begins to change; days are noticeably longer and much warmer. May is the month for school field trips. Tanacross students have taken trips to places as far away as Los Angeles and Seattle; in 1978, for example, a village dance troupe went to Seattle to participate in a folk festival. In June the search for seasonal work begins again as the Bureau of Land Management gears up for the fire-fighting season. Village crews are organized and all members of the crew, male and female, have to take physical examinations to determine if they are fit. Summer is the most active season of the year, with its wage employment, fishing, excursions along the river to look for moose tracks, and baseball and volleyball games in the late evening. Summer also is the time for potlatches.

## The Potlatch

The most important ritual in the Athapaskan culture of east central Alaska is the potlatch, the only ritual which has retained its vitality and strength up to the present. Since many items of clothing and personal adornment in the collection were worn primarily during potlatches, it will be useful to provide a description of this important contemporary event.

The term potlatch refers to the ritual distribution of gifts after several days of feasting and dancing. It can commemorate or celebrate a number of occasions, such as the recovery from illness of a relative or friend, but the most compelling reason for holding a potlatch is the occurrence of a death (Guédon, 1974, pp. 204–205). The potlatch described here is a composite of over 20 potlatches attended by Simeone between 1971 and 1981 in villages along the Tanana and Copper rivers. Historical material has been added to indicate how the potlatch has changed.

The inhabitants of Han, Tanacross, and Upper Tanana settlements are divided into a number of exogamous matrilineal descent groups, or clans, which are grouped into two moieties, or “sides.” Membership of the clan is not localized but is spread out among a number of villages. An individual as well as his siblings belongs to his mother's clan. When a person dies, the people who care for the body and make the funeral arrangements

are the deceased's cross-relatives, those who belong to his father's clan. During the potlatch these people are especially honored for this service. Additionally, all those people who expressed sympathy and sorrow are also honored (Guédon, 1981, pp. 577–578).

The function of the potlatch, however, is not only to repay obligations. Putting on a potlatch produces a spiritual rebirth for those who have lost a loved one and demonstrates, in a material way, the love and respect people have for one another. A potlatch also increases the host's personal prestige. Consequently, it becomes incumbent upon a person to hold a memorial potlatch for the deceased several years after the funeral. This affair can be put on by fellow clan members of the deceased, such as a mother, siblings, parallel cousins, maternal aunts and uncles, and one's father, even though he belongs to another clan. All of these people can be expected to lend assistance in some way, especially if they live in the same village. In essence then, one clan acts as the host to all other clans. Fellow villagers, on the other hand, tend to give support regardless of their clan affiliations, and so the potlatch is also an inter-village affair, each village acting as a unit to host members of all visiting villages.

**PREPARATION**—The first concern of someone who plans a potlatch is the gathering of gifts and food, a task which may take several years. After accomplishing this, the potlatch host contacts close relatives and fellow clan members to see how much support can be expected from them. Though all of the responsibility for the potlatch falls on the shoulders of the potlatch host, the more support the better. A large potlatch requires considerable help, not only through donations of gifts and food, but also in preparing and serving food and in assuring the comfort of guests. Support is usually forthcoming, especially from clan members and close friends. Not to lend assistance to the best of one's ability is to be considered mean and stingy.

**INVITATIONS**—As soon as the date for a potlatch is decided, the principal men of other villages are invited, either by word of mouth, telephone, or special messenger. In turn these men inform their relatives, but as Guédon (1981, p. 579) has pointed out, the kinship connections are so tight that almost every Upper Tanana and Tanacross native has a right to attend the potlatch, regardless of whether a direct invitation is received. Kinship links also extend to the Ahtna villages along the Copper River as well as to the lower Tanana villages of Nenana and Minto. In addition, the upper

Tanana villages of Tetlin and Northway have kinship ties with Dawson City, the inhabitants of the old village of Snag now living at Beaver Creek, and Indians at Burwash Landing. For a very serious potlatch, particularly one commemorating the death of an important person, people from all these villages are invited.

In the past, all potlatch invitations were delivered by word of mouth through a messenger of particular social rank. If the messenger was considered too low on the social scale, the invitation was seen as an affront and sometimes not accepted (McKennan, 1959, p. 135). Today, most potlatch invitations are delivered by telephone, but some important people continue to rate invitations delivered in person by two well-esteemed individuals (Guédon, 1981, p. 579).

**ARRIVAL OF THE GUESTS**—Before 1942 and the construction of the Alaska Highway, most potlatches were held during the winter when people could travel by dog team. With the advent of the highway, summer travel became easier, so that today most potlatches are held when the roads are free of ice and snow. Additionally, most modern potlatches take place on weekends, to accommodate people who work. Instead of traveling together in village contingents, most families now travel individually, depending on work schedules and personal inclination. These changes have altered the welcoming ceremonies.

In the past, villagers arrived together, stopping just short of the host's village to unharness their dog teams, build a fire, and attire themselves in their best clothing. Then, in a group, they approached the host's village, dancing, sometimes three abreast; singing; and firing their rifles in answer to volleys of shots fired by the gathered host villagers. Just short of the village the guests stopped, and their leading man stepped forward to deliver a speech accompanied by exaggerated gestures such as finger-pointing or fist-pounding into his open hand. This speech was answered in like fashion, either by the man putting on the potlatch or by someone speaking for him. Subsequently a verbal duel ensued, ending only when one of the opponents could not respond.

In order to win this contest, an orator was required to recite, with precision, the history of his clan for three preceding generations. Any mistake or omission caught by the rival speaker meant loss of the contest. Orations were carried out in archaic language with metaphorical references to particular geographic features, such as lakes, hills, or mountains—the great natural icons or banners of

the Tanana River valley which symbolize the ideals of material wealth and spiritual power found in great men of the past. These men, who were identified precisely in the genealogical record, used their wealth and power to gain prestige by giving potlatches. In social stature they were above all others; they showed their status through particular signs, such as exquisitely decorated clothing, a well-groomed appearance, and the display of eagle feathers, dentalium shells, and other material objects.

In boasting about their clan, speakers also mentioned specific material objects, such as dentalium shells, guns, feathers, or beads, which were "owned" by the clan. Acquisition of an object through some particular event in the clan's history gave the clan a certain prestige and the right to use it in potlatch speeches as reference to their greatness. At the end of the speeches, the hosts formed a welcoming line and shook hands with the guests as they entered the village.

Today, in contrast to these elaborate ceremonies, guests are welcomed rather casually. Some go to the host's house to say hello and announce their arrival. There they are refreshed with tea and food before making their way to the community hall. At the hall, a general welcome and several kinds of speeches are given to all the guests after everyone has gathered for the first evening meal.

All the festivities—speeches, dancing, singing, and eating—and the potlatch are held in community halls, long buildings consisting of one large room and a separate kitchen. For potlatches the hall is usually decorated with various objects: items to be given away, and potlatch signs, such as a painted star or Hudson's Bay point blanket. On one occasion the community hall at the old village of Tanacross was decorated along the back wall with two American flags. Over these were hung approximately 40 rifles of various calibers, with colored scarves wrapped around their barrels (fig. 7). The rifles, along with the scarves, were potlatch gifts. Off to one side was a potlatch sign, a five-pointed star painted on a board, representing an ancestral headman of a particular clan who had given many potlatches. In effect these decorations were symbolic of the power Tanacross, as a village, had for putting on potlatches. The rifles showed the power of the present, and the potlatch sign the power of the past, a reminder which was referred to in speeches.

As the potlatch begins, there are several hundred people in the hall. The elderly sit in chairs ranged along the walls while younger people sit on bench-

es, on the floor, or gather in small groups around the hall. Small children dart in and out or sit impatiently on their grandparents' knees. From amidst this gathering an old man strides to the middle of the floor and begins to speak. At first his voice cannot be heard above the noise of the crowd, but as people notice his intent they stop talking and silence the children.

Sometimes the first speaker is from the host village, and so he welcomes all those who have come to share in the event. At other times the first speaker is a guest who thanks his host for inviting him and his people. Usually one old man from each village present makes a speech. Several old men might also make speeches concerning the reason for the potlatch. In this instance their speeches are similar in content and form. They begin slowly and quietly, in the native language but in an archaic dialect which most people have difficulty understanding. After several minutes the speaker's voice begins to rise and take on an intensity that is frightening to the uninitiated. Accompanying the intensity of voice are dramatic gestures. Today, only a few old men are capable of delivering this type of speech, and few people seem to pay attention. Yet another type of speech, concerning advice on how to live a good life, is very well understood. In these speeches older men explain to the younger generations how they should conduct themselves in a manner becoming to a fellow villager. Following the speeches, the feast begins.

**FEASTING**—Eating is an important aspect of all potlatches. An abundance of food is a vital element of a successful potlatch; in fact, the amount of food on hand generally determines the length of the festivities. There is one big meal a day, in the evening, when everyone eats together in the community hall. Otherwise, people eat whenever they feel like it, and food is always available.

After the speeches, the floor is swept clean and long streams of paper are rolled out on the floor, people flanking each side of the paper. The elders are seated on benches or chairs while everyone else is seated on the floor (fig. 8). Just before everyone eats, a prayer is said in English by a local man or visiting missionary. Food is then served out of large dish pans, the elders being offered the choicest meats and other delicacies, such as moose head soup. All participants, especially the old people, are served much more than they can eat, the surplus being taken home and consumed later. Giving out as much food as possible reflects well on the host and shows respect for the guests, as well as the person for whom the potlatch is given. As

guests run out of tea, they begin to sing for more. As each serving dish is emptied it is thrown across the room with a flourish and a shout, to signify that all the food has been given away.

The most favored foods are country, or wild, foods. Since these are not always available in quantity, store-bought foods are utilized as well. Several days before the potlatch, men from the village start to hunt moose, which is considered not only a staple item but almost a spiritual necessity for any potlatch. The head and meat are made into a delicious soup cooked outside, in large kettles, over an open fire. Depending on the season, salmon, ducks, and geese are also added to the fare; occasionally, so are mountain squirrel, muskrat, porcupine, and bear meat. Much of this food is also cooked outside. Various types of salads are served, along with homemade doughnuts, cakes, pies, pilot bread, and large quantities of black tea. For breakfast, people eat bacon, eggs, and toast; for lunch, various kinds of sandwiches.

**SINGING AND DANCING**—With dinner finished, the dishes cleared away, and the community hall swept clean, the music begins. Quietly at first and then stronger as more people join in, the first songs are sung, some old and at least one composed for the occasion. At a funeral potlatch, the first songs are "sorry songs" composed in remembrance of a deceased loved one, very emotional songs which move people to tears. These are sung almost in a monotone, and a heavy atmosphere of mourning fills the hall. As the deceased's nuclear family and other relatives begin to sing and dance, several old women form a tight circle around them, offering both physical and emotional support. Their heads bowed, their hair pulled over their faces, the dancers sway their upper bodies to the rhythm of the song, shuffling their feet in short steps. Their hands are held flat with the palms facing up in a supplicating manner, moving up and down to the beat of the drum. The drummer, always a man, remains stationary along with other men who accompany the women in their singing. During this period of mourning no one is supposed to talk, laugh, or smile, and children are kept under tight control. After the emotions have sunk deeply into grief, they are slowly drawn up by the lead singers and the drummer, who alters the beat and moves on to more lighthearted dance songs.

At this point, the atmosphere in the community hall changes from funereal to festive as people put aside their sadness to celebrate life with their relatives and friends. Dances are organized, with the men dancing in the middle of a circle of women

moving sideways, shoulder to shoulder, around the men. The drummer dances with the men and, as he tires, passes the drum to another, who can either accept or pass it on. Everyone dances with something in hand, either feathers, pieces of paper toweling, or a scarf (fig. 9). A man dances in one place, knees flexed and feet planted firmly on the floor, with either a heel or toe keeping time to the beat and the whole body moving up and down to the beat. Most movement is in the arms, which are sometimes bent at the elbow but can shoot straight out in time to the beat (fig. 10). A woman has somewhat more sedate dancing patterns.

As the evening wears on and more people are shoved and dragged laughingly into the dance circle, the neat organization gives way to a vibrating mass of dancers. Old women and men with canes stand up in front of their seats, bobbing to the beat. Sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, children—all dance together to songs composed about subjects as diverse as the beautiful women of Northway, the dangerous business of fighting forest fires, or the village of Tanacross. In the middle of all this activity, some men dance into the hall with cases of soda pop and deposit them in the middle of the floor. Immediately the thirsty dancers abandon their dance to grab for cans of pop, and for a short time the dance stops. It is resumed almost immediately, however, and continues on into the small hours of the subarctic morning.

For some potlatches the dancers dress up in dance costumes, heavily fringed cloth dance shirts made in the colors representing the wearer's clan (figs. 58–60) or skin vests (figs. 55–57), which are very popular. As the dancers move, the red and yellow fringes of their costumes swirl around them, filling the room with color. Added to these are the gunhos decked with colorful ribbons, feathers, and paint, with which dancers stab the air to emphasize their motions (fig. 65). A touch of regality is added by dentalium shell necklaces and beaded headbands worn by some dancers.

Whether they wear dance costumes or not, people make a great effort to be neatly dressed. The women prefer brightly colored clothing, the old women wearing skirts, the younger women pants. Men usually prefer more sedately colored clothing. Appearance, especially during public occasions, is one indication of a person's standing in the community.

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE GIFTS**—For two nights and days the people eat, dance, sing, and visit, but on the final night the routine changes. After the evening meal, guests dance for a short time; then the

community hall is swept clean, the seats are pushed to the wall, and large cloths are laid out, covering most of the floor. In the meantime the potlatch hosts leave the hall to dress themselves and gather their gifts. First, they go to their caches where all the blankets are stored and carry them to the hall in large cloth bags. No gifts are taken through the doors but are passed through a window: because the doors are used by young girls during puberty, their contact with the gifts might bring bad luck (Guédon, 1974, p. 224). If guns are not already out on display, they are also carried to the hall and stacked, with the blankets, in the center.

As previously noted, everyone attending the festivities dresses in his or her best clothes. During the distribution of gifts, however, the hosts distinguish themselves by their clothing. According to some people it is acceptable to wear white man's clothing for the actual potlatch as long as some kind of skin garment, such as a vest or coat, is also worn. If a participant has a dentalium shell necklace, bandolier, or beaded sash, it is also good to wear. Together they are the costume of the rich and powerful. The skin coat, and to a lesser degree the vest, is a sign of a rich, "friendly, honest, kindly" man who has the capability of leading the people, giving good advice, and making a good living for himself. The dentalium shells also indicate social status. The beaded sash is a sign that great relatives are remembered and that the participant is descended from great people. Those giving their first potlatch also wear special gloves, so that all the wealth they distribute will eventually return. Without gloves their wealth would wash away, like dirt when they wash their hands. These gloves are used only during the potlatch and are otherwise kept in a safe place. Additionally, some people wear magic charms wrapped in scarves tied around their arms, to make their wealth return faster.

After dressing, the hosts reenter the hall and gather in the center, where they are joined by an elder who leads them in a potlatch song. This song is very important and must be sung very precisely. In general the song asks for "blessings" on those who are giving the potlatch as well as for those who have died and have gone "under the sky," the world between the earth and the sky. Through the potlatch song and the distribution of gifts, the material and spiritual world are joined. By distributing gifts, the physical world is made easier. The spiritual regeneration produced by giving and attending a potlatch produces a feeling of well-being and community in which both the living and dead can participate. In putting on a potlatch, the

hosts feel they have done something for the deceased, who can then pass on to the next world contented.

After the song is finished, a list of those who contributed to the potlatch and what they contributed is read. Then an elder or famous man makes a speech on behalf of the hosts, identifying the gifts, their origins, and the total amount spent. He also praises the person for whom the potlatch is given and generally indicates the reasons why the potlatch is being held (Guédon, 1974, p. 224). After these preliminaries, the distribution of gifts begins.

**GIFTS AND GUESTS**—Guns, blankets, and beadwork, along with bolts of cloth, are considered traditional gifts and are those most frequently distributed. On occasion, however, people also give television sets and stereos; by contrast, potlatch gifts during the late 19th century consisted of a few skins. In the early 20th century the acquisition of goods was facilitated by the high price of furs (McKennan, 1959, p. 139) and the presence of traders in the area, which increased the variety of goods available to be given away. More recently, government transfer payments and wages have contributed to the elaborate potlatch gift-giving, and people frequently travel to Fairbanks and Anchorage to purchase gifts and bulk food.

Today rifles are considered the most prestigious gifts; 30–30 Winchester lever-action rifles are most commonly given, but 22s and shotguns are also “put out” or distributed at a potlatch. Skin vests, guncases, moccasins, and dentalium shell necklaces, in addition to various types of beaded jewelry, are often given away. Blankets make up the bulk of the gifts, however, and are ranked according to color and quality. White Hudson's Bay or Pendleton point blankets are the most prestigious, while the least important are inexpensive synthetic blankets of various colors and patterns. Expensive blankets hold a particular meaning. Besides being given away, a “high-priced blanket” is draped over the body as it rests in the coffin, signifying that the family covers the body with their love. When this same type of blanket is given away to a cross-relative or special friend of the deceased, it indicates that part of what is given to the body is given to the friend; the host wraps that person in love.

Money is also given away, but as a gift it does not have the status accorded to guns, blankets, and beadwork. Money has recognized power, however, and people say that it can talk. This metaphor goes beyond the usual “money can make people do things” because money, during a potlatch, seems

to be an entity with its own spirit. Through magic, such as a charm wrapped in a scarf tied around the arm or the wearing of gloves, money, like the other wealth distributed, can be made to return to an individual.

All of these gifts, including money, which is supposed to help pay for the expense of attending the potlatch, are distributed to guests according to social rank. A person's social position depends in part on who his or her relatives were and on the number of potlatches that individual has given. Today almost every old person is acknowledged as important, but the middle-aged have high social status only if they are heads of clans and have given a number of potlatches. A young person is recognized in relation to his or her parents, but according to some people, is not generally entitled to expensive gifts. The gifts an old person from another village might receive include a gun, some blankets, money, and occasionally several pieces of beadwork. Other people who rate such a profusion of gifts are members of the opposite clan who helped with the burial, particular relatives, and friends of the deceased. Also rewarded with several gifts are people who had to travel long distances, good dancers, singers, and orators. Less prominent people receive proportionately fewer gifts, but everyone gets something.

The first gifts are given to old, distinguished people who traveled great distances, then local dignitaries and then lesser persons, each recipient receiving his gift with studied indifference. All the time the gifts are being distributed, an interested buzz fills the hall as people watch to see who gets what. When certain people receive their gifts applause breaks out, as though the crowd is showing its approval. It is very important that people of a certain rank are not slighted, because this would produce disgruntled guests and lower the prestige of the host. It is also important that a host not give the best gifts to those closely related to him. Mistakes of this kind can be held against the host and remembered by those who feel they were slighted. Besides watching the proceedings, some people, especially those who are planning a potlatch, begin transactions with other guests to buy their gifts; this trade increases with the final distribution of gifts. Before the gathering breaks up, a final dance begins as people dance and sing with their gifts to show their appreciation and to thank their hosts. This is the final act and, depending on the lateness of the hour, people either prepare to go home or get ready for bed. By the next morning most of the guests have left the village, which re-

sumes a normal pace as people return to their usual pursuits.

**CONCLUSION**—The potlatch is an important event encompassing the social, political, economic, and spiritual aspects of modern Athapaskan life. Socially, the potlatch is a vehicle for enhancing personal as well as clan and village prestige. It also provides the only opportunity for the larger Athapaskan community of east central Alaska to gather, visit, and strengthen ties. In this vein, the potlatch is also a political event enabling the Athapaskan community to assert and fortify its sense of community and ethnic pride. Economically, the potlatch helps create a dynamic culture in which modern ways of making a living, such as wage labor, cannot only be incorporated into traditional forms but used to elaborate them. For example, people use part of their monthly earnings to invest in potlatch gifts which can be stored for use at a later date. The potlatch is more than a redistribution of wealth; as Guédon (1974, pp. 238–239) noted, it also gives “meaning to economic achievements.” On yet another level, the potlatch connects the physical and spiritual worlds.

In all aspects of modern Athapaskan life, the potlatch is the only place where people are likely to wear their traditional clothing, the only time they can emphasize their Indianness and display the regalia which symbolizes their social position and achievement. Just as the potlatch is an integral part of modern native culture, so are the dress and accoutrements which help to give it meaning.

## Crafts

Objects in the collection are not only manufactured for use but also are made to sell to collectors, museums, and tourists. The production of crafts is an important aspect of the contemporary Athapaskan economy. As noted previously, this production is principally a woman's domain, reflected in the type of items most frequently sold: beaded moccasins, beaded hairpieces, necklaces, earrings, purses, mittens, and baskets. To a lesser extent, men also sell their work: drums, bows and arrows, and dogsleds.

The process from production to sale generally follows the same course. To construct a pair of moccasins, for example, the women first collect materials: tanned moose skin, beaver fur for trim, beads, thread, and felt. If one of them has an untanned skin and the inclination, she can tan it herself. This process produces a very soft, dark

brown skin, similar to good quality wool felt but richer in color and more durable. Because of the time and effort involved in preparation, some women prefer to buy skin. A native-tanned moose skin like that just described costs between \$300 and \$500, depending on quality and size. It is much preferred for bead appliqué and sewing, as it does not stretch. Because of the cost, however, many people resort to using less expensive machine tanned skins which have neither the good working character nor the feel of locally tanned skins.

Because skins are not always available, some women begin the process by beading moccasin vamps; these are usually made of white felt, which is inexpensive and easy to obtain. During the winter women sew many pairs of these vamps, either holding them for future use or selling them to women who have skins. The small glass seed beads used for decorating the vamps are usually purchased at stores in Fairbanks or Anchorage. Seed beads cost about \$2.50 for a hank consisting of a dozen six-inch strands of beads. After the vamps are decorated, the moccasins are cut out. The pieces are then sewn together and trimmed with beaver fur.

There are various avenues open to women for selling their products. Both local stores and those in the urban centers take native products on consignment. Other stores buy items directly, but pay lower prices because their retail prices include a markup to cover expenses.

More lucrative to the individual craftsperson is a network, operating by word-of-mouth, through which friends and relatives in the urban centers refer possible buyers. Also, since beadwork is a highly personalized art form, women create their own designs and color schemes. These artists develop reputations and their work is actively sought. Such individuals bypass middlemen and retailers and deal directly with buyers. Through this network, Tanacross women have sold crafts to both white and native people throughout the state.

The most common items made for sale are moose skin moccasins like those in the collection. These range in price from \$35 to \$120, depending on the decoration and place of purchase. Birch bark baskets are another common item, ranging in price from \$5 to \$10 for a small flat one to several hundred dollars for a large one with ornate spruce root binding. Small beaded jewelry is often made because it takes small amounts of time and materials but produces a relatively good rate of return. Generally, the price of crafts is not com-

mensurate with the time it takes to produce them. Consequently, the larger items—gun cases costing between \$100 and \$300; beaded baby straps ranging from \$300 upward; mittens; and coats which cost \$1,000 or more—are difficult to find and usually made on commission. The majority of craftspeople spend most of their time on items which can be made quickly and will sell well. They know that most tourists have neither the money nor the inclination to purchase an expensive item which will not be used.

Income from craft production varies. In one case, a woman from Tanacross made \$2,000 in one year. In another instance, a woman from the same village was able to sell enough crafts to make a substantial down payment on a car. But generally the business is not so lucrative.

Today crafts are taught in grade school by Indian education instructors as well as by parents at home. A statewide organization, the Institute of Alaska Native Arts, offers scholarships for young craftspeople to study with masters and in other ways stimulates the production and upgrading of native crafts. This organization also offers a “materials inventory” of supplies, including hard-to-obtain items such as babiche, American dentalium shells, caribou skin, and deer hooves, all of which can be ordered by mail or purchased directly at the Institute’s office in Fairbanks.

There are a variety of influences seen in modern crafts. Beadwork designs derive from such diverse influences as the traditional geometric forms found on one knife sheath in the collection (fig. 62c) and flower patterns introduced in the mid-19th century. More contemporary sources come from designs on paper towels (fig. 39e); the logo of an Alaska Department of Fish and Game publication; or a United States Postal Service eagle (fig. 52).

Materials come from a variety of sources, showing continuity with the past and innovation. Dentalium shells, as previously noted, have a long tradition of indicating a person from a higher class or chief. They were probably introduced into the interior of Alaska by the Chilkat Tlingit (McClellan, 1975, pt. 2, p. 505). After contact with the Indians, both the Russian-American Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company imported these shells, which were of great value to the fur trade. A box of shells was worth over £2,000 at Fort Yukon in 1848 (Murray, 1910, pp. 71–72).

Today there are three types of dentalium used by native people: American, Japanese, and African. The American type was the original variety traded into the interior and comes from the west

coast of North America. It is smooth and shiny in appearance, difficult to obtain, and consequently considered to be more valuable than the others. The most common are the Japanese varieties, ribbed and chalky in appearance; and because they are so easy to buy, much less prestigious. Much larger, but similar to the American, is the African variety; because of its size and relative abundance, it has an intermediate value.

Large glass pony beads and seed beads, as well as a variety of other decorative materials, were also introduced through the fur trade. For example, on his exploratory trip up the Yukon River in 1843, the Russian explorer Lieutenant Lavrentiy A. Zagoskin carried a quantity of trade goods. Zagoskin’s stores included red, white, and black glass beads, 80 strings of “steel-blue color” beads, 517 dentalium shells, a variety of earrings, copper and iron bracelets, small bells, copper rings, 10 “hollow buttons,” and 20 “naval uniform buttons” (Zagoskin, 1967, pp. 161–162).

By the mid-19th century, Athapaskans were receiving large quantities of foreign decorative materials, using them as a measure of wealth, and as decoration for their bodies and clothing (Murray, 1910; Zagoskin, 1967; VanStone, 1981). Most aboriginal clothing had disappeared by the end of the century, but beads, buttons, dentalium shells, and mother-of-pearl continued to be used to decorate new styles of clothing, such as the chief’s coat. Today these items continue to be used, as indicated by the objects in the collection.

### III. The Collection

#### Introduction

In the catalog of the Department of Anthropology, Field Museum of Natural History, the collection of contemporary Athapaskan material culture described in the following pages is assigned 58 numbers representing 65 objects (see Appendix 1). Paired objects such as moccasins and mittens have one number and are counted as single items. Appendix 1 associates each object with its maker, for whom brief biographical information can be found in Appendix 2.

Objects in the collection are described within the following use categories: subsistence, transportation, household equipment, tools and sewing equipment, clothing and items of personal adorn-

ment, and ceremonial equipment. The descriptions incorporate information obtained by the collector in the field. All objects are illustrated. For comparisons we have relied most heavily on McKennan (1959, 1965), Clark (1974a), and Osgood (1971). Other ethnographic accounts are, of course, cited when relevant.

## Subsistence

The collection contains a single self *bow* made of birchwood. The stave is rectangular in cross section, with slightly convex sides. Paired V-shaped notches at the sides are cut near the end of each horn for attachment of the bow string, which is made from a single strip of moose skin babiche. On the inner surface of the stave, near the grip, a bow guard is lashed with moose hide. This projecting piece of wood absorbs the impact of the string and is characteristic of all Alaskan Athapaskan bows. The entire weapon is painted with orange paint to simulate the red ocher that was used traditionally to color bows and arrow shafts (fig. 11a). According to informants, most bows were tempered by placing the stave, wrapped in green willow bark, in a fire. The bark kept the bow from burning, so it was only scorched. McKennan (1959, p. 51) noted that Upper Tanana bows were rubbed with a mixture of grease and squirrel blood, which was believed to toughen them.

There are four *arrows for large game*. Three arrows have antler heads with long, thin tangs inserted into deep slits in the distal ends of the circular birchwood shafts; the fourth has a copper head. The hafting on all four arrows is reinforced with sinew lashing. Since the shafts are very regular in shape, it is possible that they are made from commercial dowels. Orange paint has been daubed on the lashing and shafts of the arrows with antler heads, and the heads themselves have a light coating of paint. The proximal ends of the shafts are flattened on opposite sides to accommodate a finger hold. Notches have been cut at right angles to the flattened surfaces and to the planes of the arrowheads.

All four arrows are fletched with raven feathers split in half. The barbs have been removed from each end of the vane, exposing about half an inch of the spine. Each arrow shaft has paired feathered vanes placed approximately 2.5 cm from the proximal end. Each vane is parallel to the long axis of the shaft and is not spiraled. The feathers are lashed to the shaft with sinew (fig. 12a-b, d-e).

A single *arrow for birds and small game* is similar in every respect to those just described, except that it has a blunt antler head with a wedge-shaped tang (fig. 12c). Blunt antler arrowheads were said to have been preferred to empty cartridge cases, which tended to go through the animal. The large game arrowheads were made to detach from the shaft so that they would work their way into the animal as it walked. None of the arrows has identification marks.

Similar bows and arrows are described and illustrated for the Upper Tanana (McKennan, 1959, pp. 51-55, fig. 5), Kutchin (McKennan, 1965, p. 36; Osgood, 1936, pp. 82-83), Southern Tutchone (McClellan, 1975, pt. 1, pp. 282-289), Han (Osgood, 1971, pp. 70-71; Jones, 1872, p. 322), and Koyukon (Clark, 1974b, pp. 154-155). According to McKennan (1959, p. 55, pl. 1, lower left), when in use the bow was "held more horizontally than vertically, the left hand being used to grasp it from the underside, while the arrow in passing over the upper side of the bow is steadied between the extended thumb and the index finger."

Bows and arrows were very much a part of Upper Tanana culture in the 1920s and 1930s. All men over 60 years old today remember hunting small game with these traditional weapons, since cartridges were often difficult to obtain. A photograph taken at Tanacross in the early 1930s shows a group of boys using bows and arrows (fig. 13).

A *quiver* made in the traditional style consists basically of a single piece of tanned moose skin sewn along the upper edge with thread. At the distal end, a strip of piping is sewn into the seam. A rectangular fringed strip decorated with red and blue tubular beads and pale blue pony beads in a geometric design has been sewn into the seam above the piping. A small piece of skin has been added to the upper end with piping in the seam, and the opening is edged with dark green cotton cloth. Along the bottom is a row of red and green yarn tassels. There is a carrying strap of tanned moose skin (fig. 11b).

Flat quivers similar to this one are described and illustrated for the Kutchin by Murray (1910, opp. p. 94) and reported for the Tanaina (Osgood, 1937, pp. 90-91) and Upper Tanana (McKennan, 1959, p. 55). Duncan (1984, p. 30) illustrates a heavily beaded Tanana quiver, ca. 1914, in the University of Alaska Museum. Murray's illustration indicates that this style of quiver was worn so that it hung under the left arm. According to Jones (1872, p. 324), arrows were placed in the quiver with the notch downward, but Upper Tan-

ana informants and Osgood (1937, p. 90) for the Tanaina stated just the opposite. Another illustration, a drawing of a Tanaina quiver with arrows by John Webber, artist with Captain James Cook's third expedition (1776–1780), shows the arrow points emerging from the top of the quiver (Kaeppler, 1978, p. 268, fig. 590).

At Tanacross several people have made quivers in recent years, and so, as this specimen indicates, the traditional design is still familiar. A photograph taken at Tanacross in the early 1930s shows a man holding a bow and wearing a quiver decorated with beads and what appears to be dentalium shells (fig. 14).

A gun case constructed of a single piece of native-tanned moose skin and made for a 30–30 Winchester has a fringed insert in the seam along the lower edge for about half its length. There is a strip of piping in the other half of the seam. Separate pieces of skin notched at the edges, with floral designs in blue, translucent red, brown, translucent orange, and translucent green pony beads, are sewn to the case just below the center and around the opening. Tassels of pink, purple, and red yarn are attached along the lower edge next to the fringe. All sewing is with thread (fig. 15a).

This type of gun case is traditional in design and has been used by most adult informants at Tanacross during their lifetimes. There can be many variations in the decoration of such cases, but basically all are constructed in the same manner and the decorations occur in the same places. An early Han case is illustrated by Adney (1900, p. 505), and a photograph in Duncan (1984, p. 28) shows a case from Fort Yukon, dating about 1900, in the University of Alaska Museum. A photograph taken at Tanacross in the early 1930s shows hunters, with gun cases, preparing to depart on a caribou hunt (fig. 16).

Another gun case, a true case rather than a scabbard like the one just described, is made of two identical pieces of native-tanned moose skin. It is sewn together with thread and has a strip of piping in the seam. The inside is lined with a soft blue matted cloth, and the opening is closed with a zipper. Separate beaded bands of skin have been added around the rim and at the center of the case. The floral designs, in translucent red, green, white, and two shades of blue pony beads, are lazy-stitched and thread-sewn. Below the beaded band at the opening and on both sides of the band at the center are simple geometric designs in red and white tubular beads. Along the upper edge is a carrying

strap of moose skin. At intervals along the lower edge, red and blue yarn tassels are attached at the ends of short strands of large translucent red, translucent blue, and clear beads. This case is of sufficient size to accommodate a bolt action rifle and is considered by informants to be too bulky. It is actually a copy of a non-native case, but with beaded bands in traditional locations (fig. 15b).

An unusual device for carrying a firearm is a *rifle strap*, or sling, a form which apparently evolved in the village of Northway and has not been used elsewhere. It consists of a one-piece pocket of native-tanned moose skin sewn across the bottom and part way up one side with thread, then laced the rest of the way with a strip of moose skin. The inside of this pocket is lined with white felted cloth. A fringe of commercially tanned hide is sewn into the seam, and at the lower edge a rectangular strap of native-tanned moose skin is attached to the upper edge of the pocket. This strap is in four sections, each separated by pieces of beaver fur. The back of the strap is lined with brown cotton cloth. Where the strap joins the pocket, a short fringe of commercially tanned skin has been sewn into the seam, and at the opposite end a separate split piece of moose skin serves as a tie.

Beaded panels of cloth are attached on both sides of the pocket, to which identical fleur-de-lis designs in orange, white, green, brown, and three shades of blue pony beads are lazy-stitched and thread-sewn. Decoration on the strap consists of rosettes in blue, white, and orange pony beads. The thread which attaches the backing to the strap is strung with translucent white beads (fig. 17a). In addition to its unique form, this sling is unusual in the use of fur, which is generally found only on clothing, and in the nontraditional beaded designs. The bead colors and designs appealed to the younger people of Tanacross to whom this object was shown.

The Indians of the Upper Tanana have a story relating to the manner in which people received firearms. A poor man from Mansfield, while hunting, encountered some white people. They sold him two guns, which he took back to his village. This man was a member of the Chaz\* clan, so when the people of Mansfield heard about the guns, they became jealous. Members of the Dikagu clan at Mansfield accumulated a great deal of wealth

\* Transcription of the few native terms in this study represents only a working orthography and cannot be considered either strictly phonetic or phonemic.

and purchased the two guns "just to be great." These guns and their purchase were henceforth mentioned in potlatch speeches of the Dikagu clan.

This story illustrates the manner in which acquisition of a material object can reflect credit on a particular clan. The Dikagu people were wealthy enough to purchase the right to have the guns under their name—and to boast of the circumstances in potlatch speeches in order to build up the reputation of the clan.

A *moose call* is made from the scapula of a female moose. The sides and articular surface have been worked slightly, and a hole has been drilled near the proximal end for a carrying strap of babiche (fig. 18c). During the moose mating season, the scapula is scraped against a willow bush with an upward stroke, to imitate the sound of a bull moose's antlers as he walks through the brush. This sound is supposed to attract other moose. The scapula must be dried carefully over a fire so that it will produce an antler-like sound.

A moose call is said to be most effective when rubbed easily against a bush if a moose is known to be in the vicinity, or hard if no animals are nearby. Using the caller is considered to be dangerous, since a bull moose is very aggressive during the rutting season and is likely to charge if no cow or other bull is around. Therefore, the user must always be on guard. Most people are careful and do not like to use the caller close to a camp. A similar, Southern Tutchone moose call is illustrated in Clark (1974a, no. 248, p. 184).

A rectangular *shell bag* is made of native-tanned moose skin sewn with thread. The front and back are a single piece, with separate pieces for the sides and flap. A fringe and strip of piping is sewn to the flap, and there are strips of piping in all the seams. The shoulder strap is of skin, and the ties are of the same material. The inside is lined with blue cotton cloth. The outer surface of the flap has floral ornaments in pink, white, yellow, brown, and several shades of green pony beads (fig. 19a).

Shell bags that were hung around the neck are not generally used today by the Upper Tanana. Instead, a small bag for shells is more often carried in a backpack. Bags like the one in the collection were frequently worn in the past, however, as Figure 6 shows. There, the two Tanacross men at the right wear elaborately beaded shell bags. A more recent Tagish bag that closely resembles the one described here is illustrated by McClellan (1981a, p. 485, fig. 4). According to informants, a shell bag was worn around the neck, with a powder horn over one shoulder and a bag for percussion caps

over the other. This style of bag when made today is likely to be carried as a purse by a young woman.

## Transportation

A canvas *dog packsack*, sewn in the form of two pouches, has a single piece of backing which is thrown over the dog's back. The ties are of native-tanned moose skin (fig. 20). Photographs taken at Tanacross in 1982 demonstrate the manner in which the two pouches are tied together and the pack fastened to the animal (fig. 21a-e). Osgood (1936, p. 64, figs. 10-11) described and illustrated Kutchin dog packs and how they were tied. The use of dogs as pack animals is also mentioned for the Upper Tanana (McKennan, 1959, p. 92), Chandalar Kutchin (McKennan, 1965, p. 41), Koyukon (Clark, 1974b, p. 136), and Southern Tutchone (McClellan, 1975, pt. 1, pp. 274-275, pl. VIa). Upper Tanana dogs packed and ready for a trip are shown in a photograph taken at Tanacross about 1920 (fig. 22).

Particular importance is attached to the method of loading the dog pack, since this is vital to the comfort and endurance of the animal. All soft materials must be packed on the inside, next to the dog's body; all hard materials have to be placed on the outside. Equal distribution of the weight on each side is also important. As noted in the illustrations (fig. 21a-e), the pack is always set back on the shoulders and not on the neck.

## Household Equipment

A large wooden *spoon* is cut from a crooked piece of birchwood. It has a long handle with a suspension hole at the proximal end (fig. 18a). Wooden spoons are also described for the Upper Tanana by McKennan (1959, pp. 44-45, fig. 4c-f) and for the Han by Osgood (1971, p. 73). Adney (1900, p. 503), writing about the "Moosehide Indians" (the Han), described a feast given by Chief Isaac in his tent. While the meat was cooking, the cook "brought out a large wooden spoon and, skimming the pure grease off the top of the kettles, passed it around the circle."

The collection contains a bowl-shaped *baby-carrying cradle*, made from a single piece of birch bark to support the infant in a sitting position. The edges are reinforced with strips of spruce root and the whole is lashed with the same material. This type of cradle is rarely used today, but was once

widespread among western Athapaskans. The construction of this example is traditional, except that the center strap which the child straddled is made of blue and white cotton cloth, heavily ornamented with Japanese dentalium shells and thread-sewn pony beads in a variety of colors. The infant was held in the cradle with ties of moose hide (fig. 23a).

Similar cradles are described for the Upper Tanana (McKennan, 1959, pp. 88-89), Kutchin (Osgood, 1936, p. 44, pl. 9a; McKennan, 1965, p. 41), and Koyukon (Clark, 1974b, p. 137). A historical photograph of a Tanana infant in a birch bark cradle is illustrated by McKennan (1981, p. 573, fig. 12), and a similar photograph of Ahtna infants is reproduced in de Laguna and McClellan (1981, p. 651, fig. 12). A cradle made at Minto in 1968 and now in the University of Alaska Museum is illustrated by R. K. Nelson (1983, p. 19).

Although the seven *birch bark containers* in the collection have many features in common, they are each sufficiently different to warrant a separate description, beginning with the three round baskets with separate bottom pieces. The first and simplest of these is made of particularly thick bark. The rim is strengthened with a piece of spruce root, and sewing throughout is of the same material (fig. 24a). The second is very similar and is also made of unusually thick bark. At the rim, the bark has been folded over and notched to form a decorative pattern (fig. 24b). The third of these baskets has a strengthened rim. A decorative strip of notched bark with the inside facing out encircles rim and bottom. This basket is made of the previous year's bark. The spruce root lashing around the rim is dyed red, and short strands of clear, metallic, and white beads with yarn tassels hang from it in four places (fig. 25b).

A tall, oval basket with a separate bottom is made of new bark. Shaped like a wastebasket, it is perhaps intended for that purpose. The rim is strengthened with a strip of spruce root, and has spruce root lashing throughout. Separate decorative strips of bark, inner side out, have been added around the rim and bottom. Strands of large green, white, and red beads with moose hide tassels hang at intervals from the rim (fig. 26b). A very similar Tanana basket is shown in a photograph taken in the 1930s (Hosley, 1981a, p. 542, fig. 21).

A shorter, wider oval basket, also made of new bark, is virtually identical to the one just described, except that there is a piece of bark reinforcing the side seam and the beads on the tassels are red, blue, and green (fig. 26a).

A round basket made of a single, folded piece of new bark has its rim strengthened with a strip of notched spruce root sewn with the same material. The tassels are of large red, white, and yellow beads and strips of moose hide (fig. 25a).

The last birch bark container is shallow and more like a tray than a basket. It is made of a single piece of folded bark from the previous year, has a reinforced rim, and is lashed with spruce root. Separate decorative pieces of bark, inner side out, have been added at either end. Thread-sewn metallic beads are fastened to the rim just above these added pieces (fig. 23b).

Birch bark baskets, usually of the four-corner-folded variety, are described for a number of Alaskan Athapaskan groups (Clark, 1974b, p. 133; McKennan, 1959, p. 41, fig. 3, 1965, p. 39). According to informants at Tanacross, birch bark baskets were intended primarily for storage in the 1920s and 1930s, when metal pots and pans were used for cooking. Fish and berries were packed into baskets and covered with grease; then, a lid was sewn on top. Although none of the baskets described here is sewn tight enough for storage, all are made in much the same manner as the earlier containers, but fancier for the tourist trade. Figure 27 shows Annie Denny of Tanacross making baskets. Two of her works are in the collection.

## Tools and Sewing Equipment

Flesh and fat were removed from a moose skin with a *fleshing tool*. The Indians consider such an implement to be part knife and part axe. The example in the collection is made from a moose tibia which has been transversely cut for slightly more than half its length. To this cut area, a steel blade with a serrated edge has been attached. The blade is lashed to the bone handle with babiche which is also drawn through a pair of holes drilled in the handle and the blade. There is a carrying strap of babiche (fig. 18b).

A *skin tanner* has a serrated, semilunar blade made from an old saw blade set directly into an antler handle and held in place with pegs of the same material (fig. 28f). This implement was used to soften a skin during the last stages of the tanning process. McKennan described and illustrated similar knives for the Upper Tanana (1959, p. 66, fig. 6a) and Chandalar Kutchin (1965, p. 38, pl. 18b); these were also used for working skin. He noted the presence of another form of semilunar knife, presumably without a serrated working edge, that

resembled the Eskimo ulu and was used to cut fish. Informants reported that the implement described here was used for both purposes.

Woodworking tools are represented in the collection by two *crooked knives* with steel blades and curved moose antler handles. The faces of the blades are sharpened within the bend and along the length of the same side. The handles form slightly more than half the total length. The proximal ends of the blades fit into slits in the handles and are held in place with antler pegs. The handle of one specimen is colored with orange paint in imitation of red ocher. Both knives are for right-handed individuals (fig. 28h-i). Similar knives, widespread in the subarctic, are described by McKennan (1959, p. 66) for the Upper Tanana. An all-purpose *straight-bladed knife* has an antler handle and a stainless steel blade from a commercial paring knife (fig. 28g).

Two *snowshoe awls*, for carving grooves in snowshoe frames, have heavy antler handles and steel blades with wedge-shaped points, apparently made from large nails. The blades are simply inserted into holes in the handles (fig. 28a-b). A very similar implement is illustrated in Clark (1974a, p. 78, no. 98).

Two paired moose antler *netting needles*, for weaving snowshoe webbing, are pointed at both ends and have holes drilled in the center (fig. 28e). Such needles, described by McKennan (1965, p. 38) for the Chandalar Kutchin, are widely distributed in the subarctic.

There are two *sewing awls* in the collection. One is quite simple, consisting of a moose antler handle into which a steel point has been inserted, probably a sharpened nail (fig. 28c). The other is older and of more complicated construction. It has a laminated handle made of dimes, nickels, pennies, pieces of skin and, at the proximal end, the top of a cartridge case. The blade is made from a small triangular file (fig. 28d). This awl was found in an old fish camp across the Chisana River from Northway village, and is estimated to have been made sometime in the very early 20th century. When Simeone showed this awl to informants, they recalled having seen and used similar implements. He also saw one collected at Copper Center between 1906 and 1910.

A roll-up *sewing bag*, made of red, green, and blue felt sewn with thread, has three pockets, two facing toward the top and one in the flap facing toward the bottom. At the upper end is a moose skin tie with a large red bead at its end. Two of the pockets have rectangular moose skin patches

for needles. Below these patches are floral designs in blue, white, green, and translucent pony beads. The flap has a similar ornament in red, white, and green beads. The pockets and flap are outlined with white beads (fig. 19b).

Sewing bags of this style are widespread throughout Alaska and are used today by both Indians and Eskimos. A Tanacross informant, aged 63 in 1981, noted that she had never owned a sewing bag of moose or caribou skin, only bags like this one, made of cloth. The two bags illustrated in Clark (1974a, pp. 96-97, nos. 131-132), made by the Southern Tutchone and Koyukon Indians, are much smaller than the one described here but similar in design.

### Clothing and Items of Personal Adornment

Many of the items of clothing described in this section, particularly those heavily ornamented with beads, were worn primarily at potlatches or made to be given as potlatch gifts. Such special clothing could just as well have been included in the following section, devoted to items of material culture which traditionally have been most closely associated with the potlatch. In general, although people like to dress up, they feel somewhat uncomfortable wearing fancy Indian clothing and items of personal adornment, especially in the presence of non-natives. As noted in the previous chapter, beaded items and clothing made of moose hide are an indication of wealth and, therefore, appropriate for display at a potlatch.

The collection contains two pairs of *gauntlet mittens* of native-tanned moose skin sewn with thread and identified as for a man and a woman. Construction consists of front and back pieces, with a U-shaped slit in the palm piece which becomes the inner flap of the thumb. There are strips of piping in all the seams. Separate strips of beaver fur serve as trim. The inside is lined with pieces of wool blanket. Decoration on both pairs consists of a beaded floral pattern on the gauntlet's outer surface. On one pair, the pony beads are red, blue, translucent blue, white, translucent brown, green, and translucent green (fig. 29). On the other, the colors are blue, red, green, white, and translucent yellow. Both pairs have suspension cords of blue and white yarn (fig. 30).

The construction of these mittens is the same as that described by McKennan for the Upper Tanana (1959, p. 78) and the Chandalar Kutchin (McKennan, 1965, p. 45). Although there is some

question whether mittens and gloves suspended with a cord around the neck were part of the aboriginal Athapaskan costume, the style is very old, having been noted by a number of early observers. Examples collected in the 1860s are to be found in museum collections (VanStone, 1981, pp. 22-23).

According to informants, this style of mittens is seldom worn at the present time, except by persons who wish to dress up for special occasions. Beaded gauntlet mittens worn by young people are shown in a photograph taken at Tanacross sometime between 1930 and 1934 (fig. 31).

The collection also contains two pairs of *gloves*. One pair is constructed entirely of native-tanned moose skin. The palm and backs of the first and fourth fingers are a single piece, while the backs of the second and third fingers are separate pieces, as is the front and back of the gauntlet. Separate strips of beaver fur serve as trim. A fringe of commercially tanned cowhide has been sewn into the seam on one side of the gauntlet, and there are strips of skin piping in the other seams. Part of the inside is lined with floral-patterned flannel. There are floral designs in red, white, orange, pink, translucent green, and translucent blue pony beads on the backs of the second and the third fingers and the gauntlet (fig. 32b).

The second pair of gloves has two-piece moose skin gauntlets joined to commercial gloves; separate strips of beaver fur are attached as trim. A fringe of commercially tanned cowhide is sewn into one seam of the gauntlet and a strip of piping into the other. The inside of the gauntlet is lined with brown cotton cloth. Decoration on the outer surface consists of floral designs in yellow, clear, translucent green, translucent red, and translucent blue pony beads (fig. 32a).

The antiquity of gloves among Northern Athapaskans is a matter of conjecture but, like the mittens with suspension cords, some early examples occur in museum collections (VanStone, 1981, pp. 22-23). Today, as previously noted, gloves are always worn at a person's first potlatch to bring good luck.

A two-piece *fox skin cap*, sewn with thread, is lined on the outside with purple cotton cloth and on the inside with white cotton cloth. A tail has been added for decoration. The ties and tassels are of braided red, white, and purple yarn (fig. 33a). Caps like this one, more commonly made of marten skin, are described for the Upper Tanana and Chandalar Kutchin by McKennan (1959, p. 78; 1965, p. 45). Among Indians today, fur hats are

worn by both young and old men on special occasions, such as at dog races. Hats of marten skin have prestige value, while fox skin hats do not and are more likely to be made for non-natives.

The collection contains three pairs of *winter boots*. Two pairs are virtually identical, except that the slightly larger pair is identified as for a man, the smaller for a woman. The tops are canvas with a separate vamp over the instep. The bottoms are of native-tanned moose skin. There is a pair of rectangular moose skin strips between the canvas uppers and the bottom pieces. Strips of skin piping are inserted in the seams on the bottoms. The uppers are sewn with thread; the bottoms with sinew, as are the seams where canvas and skin meet. Strips of moose skin serve as ankle ties. At the top, a braided tie of blue and white yarn is threaded through a folded loop of canvas. Decoration on both of the pairs consists of a strip of commercial cotton tape with floral designs (fig. 34).

This type of winter boot is worn at the present time during cold weather, mainly by young children and a few older people. If the weather is warmer than -10° F, there is a chance of getting the boots wet, so some people wear rubber overshoes over the skin bottoms.

The third pair of winter boots is quite different in design and construction, and is made of native tanned moose skin sewn with sinew. The uppers consist of separate vertical strips in front and back as well as in the center of each side. The strip in front includes a section that extends over the instep. There is a separate folded strip of commercially tanned skin around the top to contain a tie of the same material. A fringe of native-tanned skin has been sewn into the seam that joins the upper to the folded piece, and all other seams contain strips of skin piping. The bottom is a single piece with a T-shaped heel seam. A fringe has been sewn into the seam that joins the upper to the bottom piece. An ankle tie is threaded through holes in the upper just above the bottom piece. Decoration consists of a simple floral design on the instep in black, white, and pink pony beads. The pattern of this pair of winter boots is unusual and its origin cannot be determined with certainty. It represents, in any event, a very distinctive style of sewing (fig. 35b).

True *moccasins* are represented in the collection by two pairs, both made of native-tanned moose skin sewn with thread. The bottom of the first pair is of single piece construction with a T-shaped heel seam, straight toe seam, and combined U-shaped

instep and tongue piece. There are strips of piping between all seams. Each moccasin has an ankle piece wrapped around the lower leg held in place by a tie which runs through holes at intervals in the bottom, just below and parallel to the seam joining the bottom to the ankle bands. There is no decoration (fig. 35a).

This style of moccasin belongs to series VI in Hatt's classification of North American moccasins (1916, pp. 165-166). Examples of similar construction are described and illustrated for the Chandalar Kutchin by McKennan (1965, p. 45, pl. 23) and a pair made by the Slave and collected in the 1860s is illustrated in Clark (1974a, p. 117, no. 160). According to informants, footgear of this style were referred to as "one day moccasins" because they were so easy to make.

The second pair of true moccasins features a single-piece bottom, an upper that includes the tongue, and a vertical heel seam. An ankle piece wraps around each leg and is held in place with a tie located similarly to the tie on the first pair. Each moccasin has strips of piping in the heel seam and the seam joining the bottom to the upper. The instep is covered with a piece of red felt decorated along the edges with pink and blue embroidery thread (fig. 36a).

This style of moccasin is described for the Upper Tanana by McKennan (1959, pp. 79-80), who believed it to be a recent introduction. A photograph taken at Tolavana around 1920 (fig. 37) shows a man who appears to be wearing this style of moccasin.

In addition to the specimens just described, the collection also contains three pairs of footgear that more closely resemble *slippers* than true moccasins. All are made of native-tanned moose skin and are sewn with thread.

The first pair has a single-piece bottom with a T-shaped heel seam and a separate vamp decorated with a floral pattern in white, dark red, yellow, and translucent green pony beads. All seams have inset strips of piping. The opening is trimmed with a strip of beaver fur and the inside of the instep lined with white cotton cloth (fig. 36b). This pair is very typical of slippers made for the past 30 or 40 years throughout the Athapaskan area and frequently sold to non-natives.

The second pair of slippers is constructed of a single-piece bottom with a T-shaped heel seam joined to a narrow, rectangular upper. Each slipper has a strip of beaver fur attached to its top, a separate vamp, and a notched strip of green felt sewn into the seam between the upper and the

bottom piece. Strips of piping are sewn into the horizontal section of the heel seam and the seam that joins the vamp to the bottom. There are ties of commercially tanned skin sewn to each end of the upper. The vamp is decorated with floral designs in yellow, dark red, green, and translucent pink beads and a border of red and white beads (fig. 38b). According to informants, the use of a felt strip around the back is considered old-fashioned and is not much seen anymore.

The third pair, perhaps more accurately referred to as moccasin-slippers, has a flat, single-piece bottom; the upper includes the instep and has a straight seam in the back. A short tongue is a separate piece, and the shoelace-style ties are of commercial skin. There are strips of piping in all seams. The inside is lined with printed cotton cloth. On each instep, an eagle is stitched in black and white beads over an outline of the bird drawn on the skin with a red crayon. Beaded geometric designs in black and white beads extend along the sides and around the back (fig. 38a).

This style of moccasin-slipper was worn in the 1920s and 1930s. The application of beadwork around the heel is considered today to be rather old-fashioned. Moccasin-slippers are not intended as footgear for traveling, but rather for use at home or around the fire in camp.

A *necklace* has a circular pendant of white wool heavily beaded on the front with white, blue, and translucent tan beads. The design is taken from a paper toweling border. The loop of blue and white beads is sewn with thread in an over-under weaving technique in which the beads are strung individually (see Orchard, 1975, p. 134, fig. 114, p. 136). This style of necklace is worn occasionally by the Indians themselves, but more often made either to be sold to non-natives or given away at potlatches (fig. 39e).

There are two quite different *chokers* in the collection. One is a loop beaded in a manner similar to that of the necklace loop just described; it has a commercial metal clasp. Attached is a circular pendant of white wool heavily beaded on the front. The beads are dark blue, light blue, and a pale cream color (fig. 39c). The design and construction of this choker is characteristic of the entire northern Athapaskan area.

The second choker, a rectangular piece of felt, is heavily beaded on the front and lined with brown cotton cloth on the back; it has a commercial metal clasp. The background of the thread-sewn beaded design on the front is in white beads. Floral patterns in green, blue, translucent green, and trans-

lucent red beads complete the design. Along the lower edge is a fringe of white and blue beads (fig. 39a).

A *hairpiece* is a heavily beaded circular piece of yellow felt with a metal hair fastener at the back. The thread-sewn, stylized floral design on the front has a white background. The design itself is in black, translucent blue, orange, and translucent yellow beads. Around the edge is a border of blue and orange beads, from which hang nine strands, each consisting of colored beads and large Jap-anese dentalium shells (fig. 39d). Hairpieces, like the necklace and chokers, are sometimes worn today by women on special occasions, but are more generally sold to non-natives. Duncan (1984, p. 60) illustrates two hairpieces made by Sarah Malcolm of Eagle in 1983.

A *baby strap*, which ties across the chest and holds the infant inside a robe or item of loose clothing, is a rectangular strip of native-tanned moose skin with a separate loop attached at one end and a pair of ties at the other. One side of the strap is ornamented with floral designs in pink, red, blue, green, translucent green, and translucent red beads, spot-stitched and thread-sewn. The opposite side is lined with red cotton cloth. There are lines of white beads above and below the floral ornamentation. The strap is edged with rows of red and white beads. Along the lower edge is a fringe of tassels consisting of red, white, and blue beads and red, blue, and green yarn (fig. 17b).

Baby straps are described and illustrated for the Upper Tanana by McKennan (1959, p. 88, pl. 1) and for the Kutchin by Osgood (1936, p. 40), who mentioned that the amount of decoration on the strap indicated the wealth of the woman. Photographs taken at Tanacross in 1926 and at Fort Yukon in the early 1920s show women wearing ornamented baby straps (figs. 22, 40). Similar illustrations have been reproduced frequently in the Athapaskan literature (Duncan, 1984, pp. 44, 46; McClellan, 1981b, p. 500, fig. 5; Acheson, 1981, p. 699, fig. 6; Clark, 1974a, cover).

Today, baby straps have been largely replaced by children's pack bags; straps like the one described here are made for the tourist trade. Along with gun cases, mittens, and gloves, baby straps are considered to be truly Indian.

## Ceremonial Equipment

The items of material culture described in this section can be said, with some degree of certainty,

to have been made to wear or give away at pot-latches. As noted previously, it is likely that some of the objects included in the previous section were made for the same purpose. In any event, it is clear that virtually all the clothing described in this study as well as most of the items of personal adornment are not items of everyday wear, but were made to be worn on special occasions when people were particularly anxious to stress their Indianness. The most important of such occasions would, of course, be potlatch celebrations. A photograph taken at a Northway potlatch in 1981 illustrates the extent to which highly decorated clothing is worn on such occasions (fig. 41).

An oval *hat* of birch bark covered with native-tanned moose skin is flat across the top and trimmed with strips of beaver fur. A strip of the same material hangs down the back. The inside is lined with blue cotton cloth, and a separate fringe of moose skin has been sewn into the seam around the lower edge. Around the front, there is floral ornamentation in blue, white, translucent red, and translucent green beads, on either side of which are sewn feather quills and dentalium shells. There is a vertical row of black beads on either side of the back. All sewing is with thread (fig. 33b). In shape if not in decoration, this hat appears to resemble those worn by Tanana River Indians encountered by Allen in 1885 (fig. 6).

A beaded *headband* is made from a piece of white felt with brown felt ties at either end. The ties are secured to the band with sinew. Basted onto one side of the band is thread-sewn ornamentation in blue and translucent yellow beads that covers the entire surface (fig. 39b). It is sewn in an over-under weaving technique in which the beads are strung individually (see Orchard, 1975, p. 134, fig. 114, p. 136).

Headbands are worn by many participants during dances and are considered to be an integral part of the dance costume (fig. 42). According to informants, three styles of headbands were worn: simple cloth bands, beaded bands like this one, and bands decorated with dentalium shells. As indicated in Figures 41 and 42, Tanacross people sometimes wear eagle feathers, either real or imitation, usually at the front of the headband. Two feathers indicate that both sides of an individual's family were affluent. A single feather signifies less wealth and therefore conveys less prestige. In the past, the kind of feathers worn was an indication of clan affiliation.

A *necklace* is made of dentalium shells strung on string and separated by strips of native-tanned

moose skin and rows of white-lined red beads. At the lower end is a fringe of green, white-lined red, and striped beads (fig. 43a). The lower portion of the necklace forms a pendant, a style formerly common but now rare among the Upper Tanana (fig. 44). Most contemporary necklaces simply circle the neck (McKennan, 1981, p. 571, fig. 6).

Many older people own chief's necklaces, as dentalium shell necklaces are called, which have been passed down from generation to generation. Such necklaces were worn by all the Alaskan groups, and even today among the Upper Tanana they have a definite status associated with them: the more shells a person has, the richer he or she is believed to be. McClellan (1975, pt. 1, p. 317) noted that at the time of her field work in the late 1940s and early 1950s, native peoples of the southern Yukon Territory considered dentalium shells to be the mark of a higher class person. The northern bands of the Southern Tutchone, who have had the most contact with the Han, Kutchin, and Upper Tanana, valued them the most.

There are a number of stories which relate how the people of Tanacross obtained dentalium shells. One such story tells how a man who was out hunting saw from a distance another man whom he recognized as a "bush man." These quasi-supernatural beings lead a shadowy existence in the bush, and their ability to live apart from other people makes them different from ordinary human beings. Belief in bush men is widespread among northern Athapaskans, and they have been described in some detail for the Kutchin by Slobodin (1960).

The stranger was clearly recognized as a bush man because of his "big nose," "big bones," and "big joints." The hunter hid in the brush with his bow and arrow at the ready. When the bush man walked within range, the hunter shot and killed him. Before burying him under some moss, the hunter took a necklace of dentalium shells from the body, wrapped it in birch bark, and placed it in the fork of a tree. Later, the hunter's father told him to wait for three years before wearing the necklace in case the bush man was missed and his people came looking for him.

In a second story, a bush man is out hunting and, encountering a bear, attempts to run away but trips and falls. The bear is right on top of him and the bush man appears about to be killed, in spite of his attempts to stab the bear with his knife. A Tanacross man arrives and saves him by stabbing and clubbing the bear. The bush man tells his rescuer to clean a nearby birch tree of all its limbs so that the tree will be easily recognizable.

He is instructed to return to the tree and take whatever he finds useful hanging there. Dentalium shell necklaces are what he finds hanging on the tree (for more detailed versions of these stories, see Paul, 1980).

According to the informant who related these stories, each is associated with a specific clan, although he could not remember which ones. The first story is generally not mentioned by the members of the clan that owns it, since the shells were obtained through the murder of a man and the story reflects badly on them. The second story, however, is repeated at potlatches because it reflects well on the protagonist and his clan. Because the protagonist saved a life, he was rewarded—this sort of story can be used to build the prestige and spirit of his clan.

Informants agreed that dentalium shell necklaces and similar material items were comparable to the American flag pin that a person might wear in his lapel on Memorial Day. They are symbols of remembrance of the "top people" of a person's clan, those individuals who were not only rich in material goods but were also friendly and honest and could be counted on to give good counsel and advice.

A dentalium shell *bandolier* is constructed like the previously described necklace. The rows of shells, strung on thread, are separated by strips of moose skin and rows of striped and black beads. At the proximal end are a loop fastener of commercially tanned skin and a plastic button (fig. 43b). Tanana and Koyukon leaders wearing dentalium shell bandoliers and necklaces are shown in a photograph taken at Fairbanks in 1915 (Hosley, 1981b, p. 552, fig. 9). A 1981 photograph shows a bandolier worn by a Tanacross man (fig. 45).

Bandoliers are worn by men and women at potlatches and dances, and individuals are even buried wearing them. Certain material objects, including bandoliers, were also used by men of power in their dreaming. Such an object which belonged to a powerful individual was believed to have "spirit," or the power to cure illness. When a person was ill, an object with "spirit" was placed near him to make him well.

Related to the dentalium shell bandolier is a woven, beaded *sash*. It consists of a rectangular piece of white felt, on one side of which a woven design of geometric patterns in brown, yellow, orange, white, black, green, and blue beads has been attached with thread. At the ends are fringes of dentalium shells and beads in a variety of colors

(fig. 46a). Woven sashes like this one were worn over the shoulder (fig. 41), and appear to be a modern version of the dentalium shell bandolier. Beaded sashes are very popular today and are symbols of the wearer's importance.

The collection contains three *chief's coats*, the history and significance of which has been discussed in some detail by Simeone (1983). The first of these coats is made of native-tanned moose skin. The front, back, and arms are all separate pieces, but the collar is a separate piece of commercially tanned skin. Strips of piping are sewn into the shoulder seams. Sewing throughout is with heavy thread. There is beaver fur trim around the cuffs, down each side, and around the bottom. Panels of bright red felt with beaded floral designs in a wide range of colors occur in the traditional locations: down each side, around the cuffs, and across the back. There are moose skin ties on the front of the coat, which is unlined. The beaded panels were made several years earlier than the rest of the coat and are in the style of the 1920s and 1930s (figs. 47–48).

The second coat, illustrated in color by Simeone (1983, p. 64), is a commercial black cloth suitcoat trimmed with beaver fur and ornamented in the traditional locations with red felt panels bordered with green and white cotton cloth. The panels are beaded with floral designs in a variety of colors. A fringe of dentalium shells and beads hangs from the panel across the back. The beads on this fringe are clearly older than those used on the rest of the garment. Around the bottom, above the beaver fur trim, the floral designs are sewn directly onto the coat, which has a border of green and white cotton cloth and plastic buttons (figs. 49–50).

Although this coat is similar to those made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as far as decoration is concerned, Simeone observed that cloth coats are not popular today. Skin coats like the one previously described are preferred because they are obviously more traditional. Also, skin coats are usually decorated in a more subdued fashion, although this is not apparent in comparing this garment with the skin coat previously described. Coats made of moose skin with beaver or otter fur trim are regarded as the most important and mean almost as much as the dentalium shell necklace. "Big strong people," those with considerable prestige and the ability to influence public opinion through either valuable gifts or oratory, wear both at a potlatch. Skin coats also are believed to possess power which can protect the owner.

A skin coat, particularly one made of moose skin, is the sign of a wealthy, highly respected man who has the capability to lead people, give good advice, and locate game animals and fish. Part of being a respected man is to be neat and clean in appearance, to be able to take care of one's self, and to make a good living. When a wealthy and respected man marries, it is of no importance whether the woman is physically attractive, for good clothing can make anyone attractive; she must be kind.

The third coat, although made of tan felt to simulate moose skin, has the classic design of a chief's coat. On either side in front, there are strips of beaded floral ornamentation in a variety of bright colors. This ornamentation is outlined with white beads and black cotton cloth which extends as an edging around the collar. The beaded eagle design on the back combines floral elements with the U.S. Postal Service emblem. Fringes of felt have been sewn into a seam at the back underneath the ornamentation and in the shoulder seams; there are strips of felt piping in the shoulder seams. Black cotton tape ornamented with beads is sewn around the coat's lower edge, the inside of which is lined with black-and-white checked cotton cloth. There are ties of black cotton cloth and metal hooks to hold the front together. Sewing is with thread throughout (figs. 51–52).

Interestingly, there is no special name for the chief's coat even though social status is connected with it. This suggests that its value and significance is associated entirely with the contact period. Older chief's coats are shown in a photograph taken at Tanacross in 1926 (fig. 53), while in a 1982 photograph Emma Jonathan is shown wearing a relatively new one in the same community (fig. 54). A variety of chief's coats, old and contemporary, are illustrated by Simeone (1983).

The collection contains a skin vest made of two pieces of native-tanned moose skin with strips of piping sewn in the seams. The woman who prepared the skin for this garment used a mixture of water and battery acid for the tanning process before smoking it to give the proper color. This type of tanning makes the skin stretch and difficult to sew.

The vest is lined with printed cotton cloth and sewn with thread. Fringes of moose hide have been sewn across the front and back. Just above the fringe in front, on either side of the opening, are beaded rosettes in dark blue, light blue, green, and translucent brown beads. There are three similar rosettes on the back, above the fringe; the bead

colors are dark red, blue, pink, and translucent green. These beaded ornaments, both in front and back, are sewn directly to the moose skin (figs. 55–56).

Vests like this one are frequently worn by men and women to dances and other social events. They are especially favored by young people and are worn in all upper Tanana and Copper river villages. Most vests are short like this one and the one in Figure 57, but occasionally they reach to the knees. Vests appear to be a fairly recent innovation, as they are not shown in old photographs.

A *dance shirt* is made from yellow and black felt that is trimmed with patterned gold and black ribbon. The neck opening is edged with gray cotton ric-rac (figs. 58–59). Yellow or gold and black are the colors of the Nalcine or Crow clan; other clans have different colors. Some sew animal symbols to their dance costumes (fig. 60). This garment is typical of the costumes worn at potlatch dances on the upper Tanana and Copper rivers. A dance shirt virtually identical to this garment is shown in a photograph taken at Tetlin in the late 1960s (fig. 61).

Informants maintain that cloth dance shirts were in use as early as 1927, but the decoration and type of cloth used were quite different. The earlier shirts were made either of plain or flowered calico; they were decorated with dentalium shells, yarn tassels, swan's down attached to the arm like a fringe, caribou skin fringes, and beadwork. The latter was apparently sewn to a yoke across the back and trimmed with a skin fringe.

The collection contains three *knife sheaths* made of native-tanned moose skin. Separate loops of skin are attached at the back so that the sheaths can be worn on a belt. The distal ends have metal coverings so that the knife point will not cut the end of the sheath. All sewing is with thread.

The first sheath has a beaded floral design sewn directly on the moose skin. The colors are blue, white, translucent blue, translucent red, and two shades of translucent green. The sheath is edged with red and blue beads and accented with a row of red and yellow beads down the center. Also present are four tassels consisting of beads of various colors and orange and blue yarn. Loops of moose skin with large beads at the ends are attached to either side of the metal end, which is made of aluminum siding (fig. 62a).

The second sheath is decorated in a similar fashion, except that the beaded design on the front,

below the opening, is geometric rather than floral. The colors are red, yellow, and several shades of blue (fig. 62c).

The third sheath is decorated with floral designs that represent an older style of beadwork. The colors are clear, blue, red, yellow, and translucent green. Parallel rows of red and blue beads extend down the front of the sheath, and light blue beads form the edge. The metal end is held in place with a strand of sinew stretched across the back (fig. 62b).

These knife sheaths are very well made and typical of those used in the early part of this century, but they have now gone out of fashion. McKennan (1959, p. 59, fig. 7c) illustrated an Upper Tanana knife sheath which is flat across the distal end and thus could have accommodated a metal end.

Somewhat unusual is a *knife sheath with button sash*, of red wool backed with blue cotton cloth and decorated with rows of plastic buttons. The sheath is of native-tanned moose skin with a metal end. Decoration consists of dentalium shells and red, green, and striped beads. Commercially tanned skin has been used to secure the metal end. Sewing throughout is with thread (fig. 46b).

Although buttons have been favored by Indians of the upper Tanana and Copper rivers for decorating shirts, chief's coats, and children's parkas, button sashes seem to be rare. Nevertheless, photographs of individuals wearing knife sheaths with long sashes or straps, usually of dentalium shells, are fairly common (Hosley, 1981a, p. 542, fig. 21; McKennan, 1981, p. 574, fig. 13). A photograph taken at Tanacross between 1930 and 1934 shows an elderly man wearing such a sheath and sash. The sheath has a metal end and the sash is decorated with dentalium shells (fig. 63). In the collections of the University of Alaska Museum is a sheath from Rampart, dated to about 1900, with a dentalium shell sash and a metal end. It is illustrated by R. K. Nelson (1983, p. 35).

A *gunho*, or dance baton, is a rectangular birch-wood board that narrows to form a hand grip at one end. Approximately 55 cm above the grip is a square hole to aid in holding. The board is decorated with circles, half circles, and dots outlined with pencil and painted blue and orange with commercial paints. At the top and along the edge on one side, goose, spruce hen, and owl feathers are fastened with thread (fig. 64).

The gunho was brought to Mansfield village on the upper Tanana River by the Han chief, Isaac, who came with a delegation of Indians for a pot-

latch in the 1890s. When the Han people reached Mansfield Lake, they came across with dog sleds and stopped short of the village to put on their dance clothes. Then they either danced or walked into the village with two "gunho men" leading the procession and everyone singing. When the Han left Mansfield, they left a gunho sticking in the snow. An informant noted that giving the gunho was "a great thing in the Indian way." The use of batons spread from Mansfield to other Tanana River communities.

Today at Tanacross, the Nalcine clan claims the right to the gunho, which also represents Mansfield village and is used to direct certain dances at potlatches. All informants agree that it is not used in the correct way. In earlier times there were only two gunhos at a dance, and the men holding them stood on either side of the drummer. Only the most skillful dancers were supposed to use them. Now many people carry them, as shown in Figures 7 and 65, and the batons seem to have lost their original function.

A photograph taken at Tetlin in the late 1960s shows two men holding gunhos (fig. 61), while a rather poor photograph, probably taken at Tanacross in the 1920s, shows a man holding a gunho (fig. 66). An earlier photograph, taken during a potlatch at Eagle in 1907, shows a gunho as well as men wearing a variety of dance costumes (fig. 67).

Use of the gunho during potlatch dances is described for Upper Tanana Indians at the village of Tetlin by Guédon (1974, pp. 222, 231–232) and for Indians of the southern Yukon Territory by McClellan (1975, pt. 1, p. 295, pl. 13a). The Yakutat Tlingit are described by de Laguna (1972, vol. II, pp. 618–619) as using oar-shaped wands or "dance paddles" with which to beat time during dances. Tlingit dance batons are illustrated by Gunther (1966, opp. p. 145) and by Collins et al. (1973, nos. 355–366, p. 274). Clearly there is a close relationship between these Tlingit dance batons and the Athapaskan gunho.

The collection contains two *drums*, both of the single head, or tambourine, variety. This type is used to accompany dancing and singing at potlatches and on other social occasions (figs. 10, 68). The frame of the first drum is of birchwood, the ends of which are joined by a bolted steel plate backed with a piece of wood. A moose skin cover has been stretched over the frame. The webbing on the back is babiche and the head itself is held in place with nails and staples. The decorative red

and black design on the head was done with a felt-tipped marker. The accompanying drumstick is a burl from a spruce tree and is similarly decorated (figs. 69–70).

The second drum is less traditional and has an innovative design. The frame is of birchwood covered with moose skin lashed with babiche, but the back is of plywood. This variation on the traditional backing, which changes the tone of the drum, is considered to be an experiment and may or may not be accepted. The back and sides are painted with white, orange, and blue commercial paint. Heart-shaped designs were outlined in pencil before being painted. There are two sticks with this drum, one a single piece of painted plywood with a hole at one end, the other, more traditional, a strip of birchwood bent to a circle at one end where there is sinew lashing and a bolt to hold the bend in place (figs. 71–72).

Informants noted that a drum head could be made of bear or caribou skin as well as moose skin, each material producing a different sound. Sometimes two drums are used at a dance, both with a different pitch. The tambourine drum is used by many northern Athapaskans and is widely distributed among other North American peoples. McKennan (1959, p. 98, fig. 3) described and illustrated the Upper Tanana drum. Osgood (1936, p. 100) noted that drums were absent from traditional Kutchin culture, but were imported from the Tanana River in more recent times.

#### IV. Continuity and Innovation

The Athapaskan Indians of interior Alaska undoubtedly lost much of their traditional or modified-traditional material culture by the early 20th century, due to the influx of relatively cheap commercial materials at that time. As a result, the appearance of the people and their communities was greatly altered. On the other hand, a collection like the one described and illustrated in this study, when viewed in historical perspective, makes it clear that many forms from the past have in fact been retained. This important characteristic of the collection may be obscured to some extent by the present-day use of exotic materials and new methods of manufacture. One purpose of this chapter is to show how some forms have remained the same while others have changed, and the manner in which innovation has produced a particular, uniquely contemporary material culture.

It will be immediately apparent that the collection contains few items that are not somehow useful in terms of contemporary Athapaskan culture. Some objects replicate items no longer in use and presumably owe their continuing existence to their value for the tourist trade. Perhaps the majority of objects in the collection could be used locally as well as sold to tourists, but the bow and arrows, quiver, wooden spoon, and baby cradle doubtless were made specifically to sell, either to tourists or to collectors of traditional ethnography like the authors of this study. The important point is that people still remember how to make these items that no longer have a place in the contemporary material culture inventory. These items thus represent the most direct continuity with the past.

Although these objects are survivals from the traditional material culture, there are aspects of their construction and decoration that represent innovation and change. The bow and arrow shafts are painted with orange paint to simulate the red ochre that was used traditionally, and the lower edge of the quiver has a row of red and green yarn tassels. Both the quiver and the baby cradle are decorated with glass beads and dentalium shells, prized decorative materials from the period of earliest contact.

The shell bag is associated with modified-traditional subsistence activities, but today the form is used as a purse by young women, an obvious adaptation to contemporary needs and to the tourist trade. Similarly the birch bark containers, although intended as wastebaskets and put to other contemporary uses, for the most part are constructed of traditional materials in the traditional manner.

New materials foreign to the native environment have been incorporated into a number of objects in the collection. The dog packsack, although of traditional construction, is made of canvas. Commercially tanned skin, cloth, nails, commercial gloves, and metal have been used in the manufacture and decoration of a number of objects in the collection, many of which are of traditional or modified-traditional form.

The gun case, although a form introduced by Europeans, represents a definite continuity with the past, but has been altered today to accommodate bolt-action rifles. The decoration of these cases, however, occurs in the same places as on cases of the early contact period. Truly innovative is the rifle strap, which apparently represents a new and unique solution to the problem of carrying a firearm. Also highly innovative are the chokers,

hairpiece, and cloth dance shirts, none of which is associated with the traditional or modified-traditional culture.

The tools and sewing equipment are also impressive examples of continuity. Although the blades of some tools are metal, the forms are traditional. The roll-up sewing bag is a form widespread in the arctic and subarctic, but the material is imported felt and thread rather than hide and sinew.

Significant examples of continuity, innovation, and change in the collection fall within the categories of clothing, personal adornment, and ceremonial equipment. A wide range of imported materials has been used in the manufacture of mittens and gloves, and the collection contains a variety of moccasins ranging from traditional styles to the slippers that are a favorite item of the tourist trade. The latter, like the previously mentioned shell bag, represent an excellent example of a new use for an old form. Decoration on the moccasins and slippers varies from the traditional floral patterns associated with early beadwork designs to contemporary pictorial forms. It should be noted, however, that the placement of decoration, the use of a fur trim, and the inclusion of cloth insets that run around the ankle on one pair of slippers are all associated with modified-traditional Athapaskan footwear.

An important part of contemporary potlatch ceremonies is the single-headed drum. One example in the collection (figs. 69–70) is wholly traditional, except for the use of nails and staples to hold the head in place and decoration applied with a felt-tipped marker. The second drum (figs. 71–72), while maintaining the basic traditional shape, has several innovative design features.

Dentalium shell necklaces and bandoliers, the beaded sash, knife sheaths, the sheath with button sash—all have their roots in the past but show interesting innovations, particularly in decoration and the use of exotic materials. As in the past, dentalium shells are considered the mark of a superior person.

The chief's coats are particularly good examples of the concepts that are stressed in this chapter. Change begins with the European-derived style of the coat itself, which dates from the earliest contact period. In the collection the earliest form is represented by the coat of moose skin, but there is also a garment made from a cloth suitcoat and one of tan felt that simulates moose hide. All of these coats exhibit the classic design of the traditional chief's coat, with decorative panels down each side

of the opening, around the cuffs, and across the back. Thus the chief's coats demonstrate considerable continuity with the past as far as style and decoration are concerned, but this has not prevented a wide variety of imported materials from being used in their manufacture. Furthermore, they still retain at least a semblance of their traditional power, for their decorations still represent wealth, just as in the past. In spite of changes in materials and decorative style, these coats still communicate traditional values.

So far, we have considered continuity and innovation primarily with reference to the form and physical properties of objects in the collection. Of equal interest and importance is the continuity of symbolism associated with these items of material culture and the significance of the entire concept of being well dressed.

Alexander Murray (1910, pp. 84-85) noted that among the Indians who traded at Fort Yukon, rich and poor were distinguished by clothing. The rich possessed two suits of clothes, changing them when they danced, just as people at Tanacross do today when potlatches are held. Slobodin (1981) stressed the importance which the Kutchin have always assigned to neatness of appearance, while McClellan (1975, pt. 1, p. 302) considered the Yukon Territory Athapaskans to be "definitely interested in dress" and "among those people who stress the close identity between their clothing and their 'selves.'" This intimate connection between an individual and his or her clothing was important at the time of McClellan's field work in the late 1940s and also obtained in the past (McClellan, 1975, pt. 1, p. 301).

Today among Indians of the upper Tanana River, being dressed up is very important; clothes do make the person, just as they did in the past. Clothing and personal adornment, in addition to indicating the social status derived from giving potlatches, is associated with the ideal behavior of the individual. Even though everyone is aware that an individual cannot possibly achieve the ideal, it is considered something to strive for. Thus fine clothing and personal adornment are associated with "top people," those who refrain from gossip, jealousy, boasting, and dishonesty. The ideal is to be rich, honest, clean living, friendly, and to "love" people. This is the meaning that is conveyed by fine clothes. It is not always necessary to know an individual personally, since what he or she wears can convey the concept of a "friendly, kindly person," one who can be counted on to give good advice.

In this study we have attempted to show that, first of all, traditional Athapaskan material culture, at least on the upper Tanana River and contiguous areas, is not extinct. To some extent the skills of the past and even particular items of the traditional or modified-traditional material culture have been kept alive by the demands of the tourist trade. Even more important, however, has been the retention of traditional values. Secondly, native craftspeople have never failed to appreciate the advantages of new materials and have, without hesitation, applied them to traditional forms. In fact, given the availability and great variety of these materials, it is surprising that the collection as a whole exhibits as little radical change in forms as it does. Contemporary Athapaskan material culture is vital, innovative, and modern, but with strong ideological and technological roots in the past. The objects described and illustrated in this study are not simply museum pieces, but part of a living culture with deep commitment to the past and the future.

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## Appendix 1

**Contemporary Northern Athapaskan (Han, Tanacross, Upper Tanana)  
Material Culture (Accessions 3509, 3534)**

Following is a list of the northern Athapaskan specimens described in this study. Each listing is preceded by Field Museum catalog number and includes the maker's name, the community affiliation of the maker, and the purchase price.

270101a-b	gloves, Sarah Malcome, Eagle, \$184 (fig. 32b)	270133	headband, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$65 (fig. 39b)
270113a-b	gloves, made in Minto, collected from Larry Jonathan, Tanacross, \$140 (fig. 32a)	270135	necklace, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$125 (fig. 43a)
270138	fox skin hat, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$125 (fig. 33a)	270136	bandolier, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$125 (fig. 43b)
270131a-b	winter boots, Ellen Thomas, Tanacross, \$65 (fig. 34a)	270086	sash, Jessie David, Tetlin, \$185 (fig. 46a)
270132a-b	winter boots, Ellen Thomas, Tanacross, \$65 (fig. 34b)	270141	chief's coat, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$900 (figs. 47-48)
270105a-b	winter boots, Marggie Sparks, Alaska Highway, \$150 (fig. 35b)	270140	chief's coat, Emma Jonathan, Tanacross, \$500 (figs. 49-50)
270126a-b	moccasins, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$50 (fig. 35a)	270122	chief's coat, Darlene Charlie, lower Tanana River, \$125 (figs. 51-52)
270125a-b	moccasins, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$50 (fig. 36a)	270134	vest, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$250 (figs. 55-56)
270093a-b	moccasins, Ellen Demit, Tok Junction, \$40 (fig. 36b)	270092	dance shirt, collected from Larry Jonathan, \$50 (figs. 58-59)
270097a-b	moccasins, Sarah Malcome, Eagle, \$43 (fig. 38b)	270110	knife sheath, Maggie Isaac, Dot Lake, \$40 (fig. 62a)
270085a-b	moccasins, Doris Charles, Dot Lake, \$125 (fig. 38a)	270111	knife sheath, Maggie Isaac, Dot Lake, \$40 (fig. 62c)
270094	necklace, Ellen Demit, Tok Junction, \$15 (fig. 39e)	270109	knife sheath, Annie Denny, Tanacross, \$40 (fig. 62b)
270095	choker, Ellen Demit, Tok Junction, \$15 (fig. 39c)	270137	knife sheath with button sash, Martha Isaac, Tanacross, \$125 (fig. 46b)
270096	choker, Bella Demit, Tetlin, \$25 (fig. 39a)	270124	gunho, Julius Paul, Tanacross, \$100 (fig. 64)
270112	hairpiece, Rica Paul, Tanacross, \$25 (fig. 39d)	270081a-b	drum and stick, Walter Northway, Northway, \$200 (figs. 69-70)
270129	baby strap, Martha Byrum and Annie Denny, Anchorage, originally from Tanacross, \$225 (fig. 17b)	270106a-c	drum and two sticks, Julius Paul, Tanacross, \$150 (figs. 71-72)

#### Ceremonial Equipment

270142	hat, Emma Jonathan, Tanacross, \$100 (fig. 33b)
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## Appendix 2

### Biographical Information on Craftspeople Represented in the Collection

**Martha Byrum**, the daughter of Annie Denny, was born in Tanacross but now lives in Anchorage. She is an excellent sewer and sells her work throughout Alaska.

**Doris Charles** was born on the Copper River but now lives in Dot Lake. She is a member of the Chaz clan and is well known throughout Alaska for her beadwork.

**Darlene Charlie** lives on the lower Tanana River.

**Jessie David** was born in 1910 in Mansfield village. She was the sister of the chief of Tanacross and married to Titus David, chief of Tetlin, where she lived until her death in 1981. She was a member of the Nalcine clan and is well known for her beautiful beadwork.

**Bella Demit** lives in Tetlin.

**Ellen Demit** was born in Chena village on the Tanana River, near Fairbanks, and now resides at Tok Junction.

**Annie Denny**, the mother of Martha Byrum and Marggie Sparks, was born in Mansfield village on 24 December 1907. Her mother came from Batzulnetas on the upper Copper River. She is married to Tom Denny, Sr., and lives on the Tanana River opposite the old village of Tanacross. Mrs. Denny is well known for her birch bark baskets.

**Maggie Isaac**, a member of the Chaz clan, lives in Dot Lake. She is particularly well known for her animal forms done in beadwork. Her work is illustrated in a number of magazines.

**Martha Isaac**, a member of the Dikagu clan and sister of Ellen Thomas, was born in Mansfield village on 6 October 1918 and now lives in Tanacross. Her father came from Salchaket, a village at the junction of the Salcha and Tanana rivers, and her mother from Mansfield village. Her maternal grandfather was from the Big Delta area.

**Mrs. Isaac** has considerable knowledge and expertise in sewing and is proficient in preparing her own moose skin and babiche. She does considerable sewing for the market and also for her family. Her husband was one of the first men at Tanacross to have a chief's coat in the early 1970s, and her bead patterns for such coats are used by a number of Tanacross women. She is a niece of Julius Paul.

**Emma Jonathan**, a skilled maker of birch bark baskets, was born in Mansfield village on 28 April 1915 and lives in Tok Junction. A member of the Nalcine clan, she is the wife of Steven Northway.

**Jessie Mark** lives in Tetlin.

**Sarah Malcome** was born at Eagle in 1905 and is the only Han craftsperson to contribute to the collection. She is known throughout Alaska for her birch bark baskets and for her willingness to teach people her craft. She now resides in Eagle during the summer and Fairbanks during the winter.

**Steven Northway**, the brother of Walter Northway and a member of the Nalcine clan, was born in Northway village on 25 December 1905. In addition to being a leading craftsman, he is an excellent drummer and song leader. Mr. Northway, who is married to Emma Jonathan, now lives in Tok Junction.

**Walter Northway** was born in the Northway area in 1876. He is one of the leading craftsmen in the upper Tanana region and is the traditional leader of the community of Northway. Mr. Northway, the brother of Steven Northway, is a member of the Nalcine clan.

**Julius Paul**, a member of the Dikagu clan and husband of Rica Paul, was born in Mansfield village. Mr. Paul is one of the few remaining traditional woodworkers in Tanacross, and has collaborated on two projects with the Tanacross school involving the manufacture of drums and

bows and arrows. In addition to his skill at manufacturing items of traditional material culture, Mr. Paul is also an expert carpenter. His father, Old Paul, was originally from the area around Delta Junction, on the middle Tanana River.

**Rica Paul**, wife of Julius Paul, was born in Mansfield village in May 1928.

**Marggie Sparks**, the daughter of Annie Denny, was born in Tanacross and now lives on the

Alaska Highway halfway between Tanacross and Tok Junction. She has won a number of prizes for her beadwork.

**Ellen Thomas**, the sister of Martha Isaac and a member of the Dikagu clan, was born on 20 April 1930 in Tanacross. Mrs. Thomas tans her own moose skin and until recently had sewn mainly for her own family.



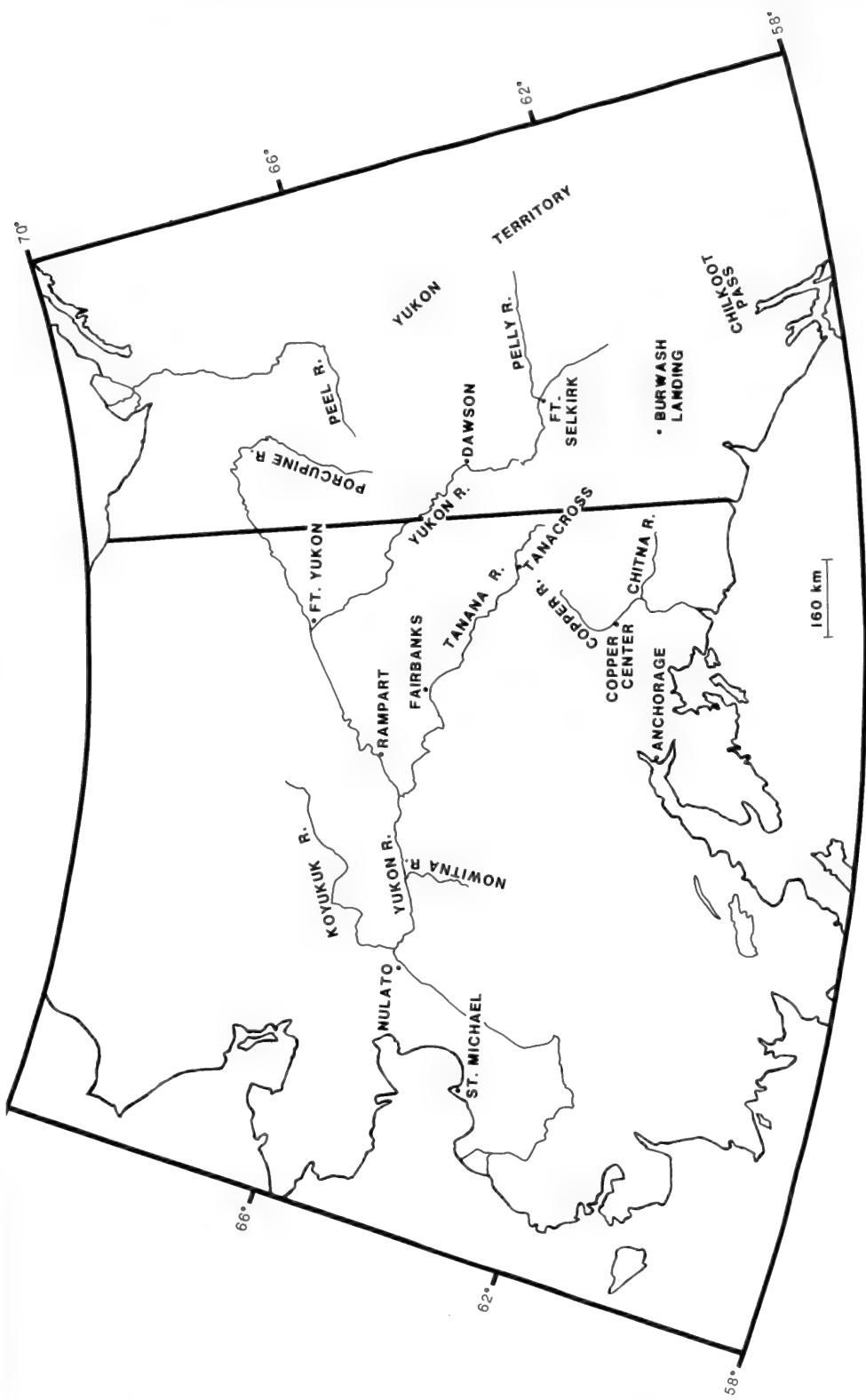


FIG. 1. Map of Alaska and the Yukon Territory.

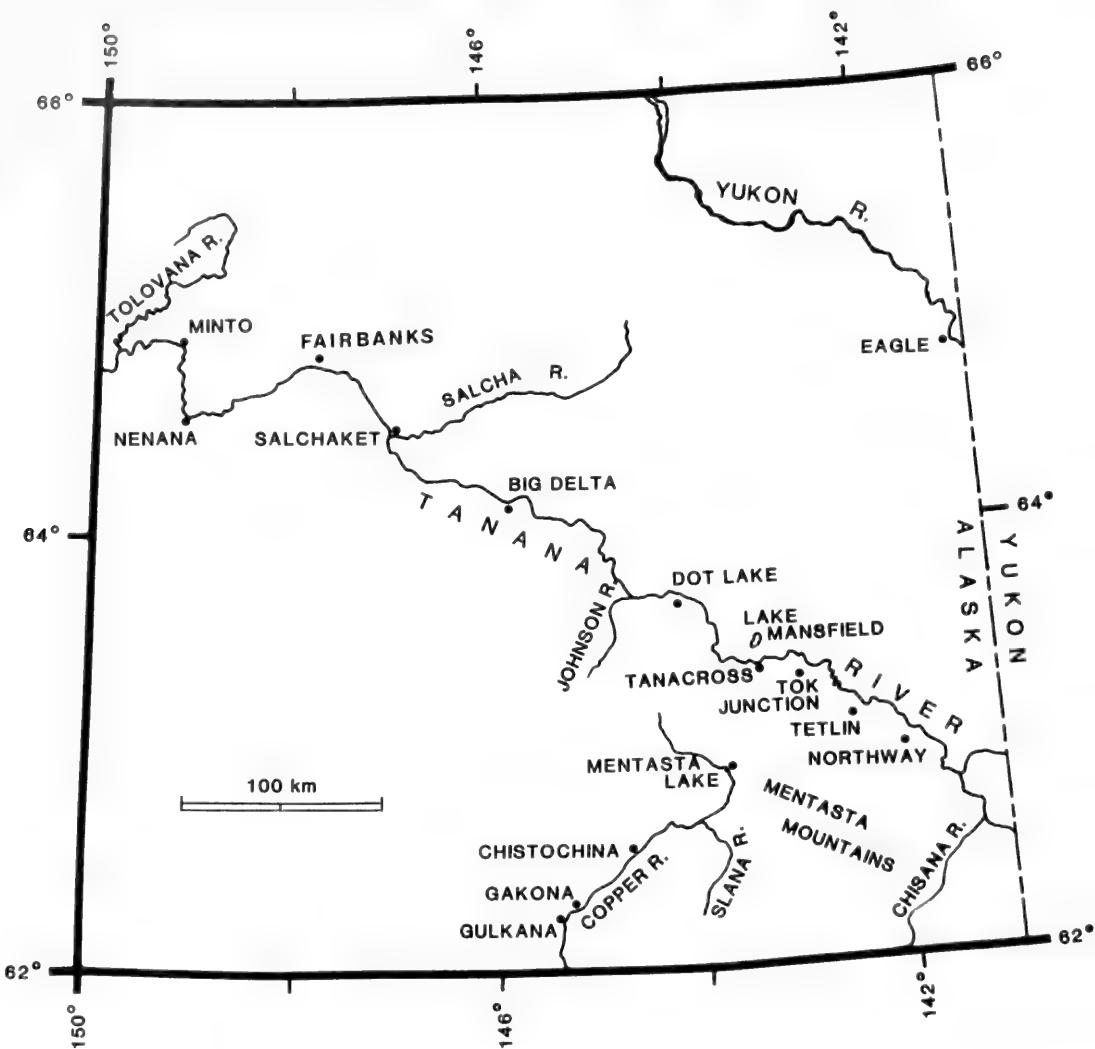


FIG. 2. Map of the upper Tanana River and upper Copper River drainages.



FIG. 3. An Athapaskan Indian photographed at St. Michael, 1877–1881, by Edward William Nelson. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 6362.)



FIG. 4. Athapaskan Indians photographed at St. Michael, 1877-1881, by Edward William Nelson. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 6383.)

6383



FIG. 5. Athapaskan Indians photographed at St. Michael, 1877–1881, by Edward William Nelson. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 6341.)



FIG. 6. Tanacross Indians photographed by Lieutenant Henry T. Allen in 1885 (Allen, 1887, opp. p. 79).

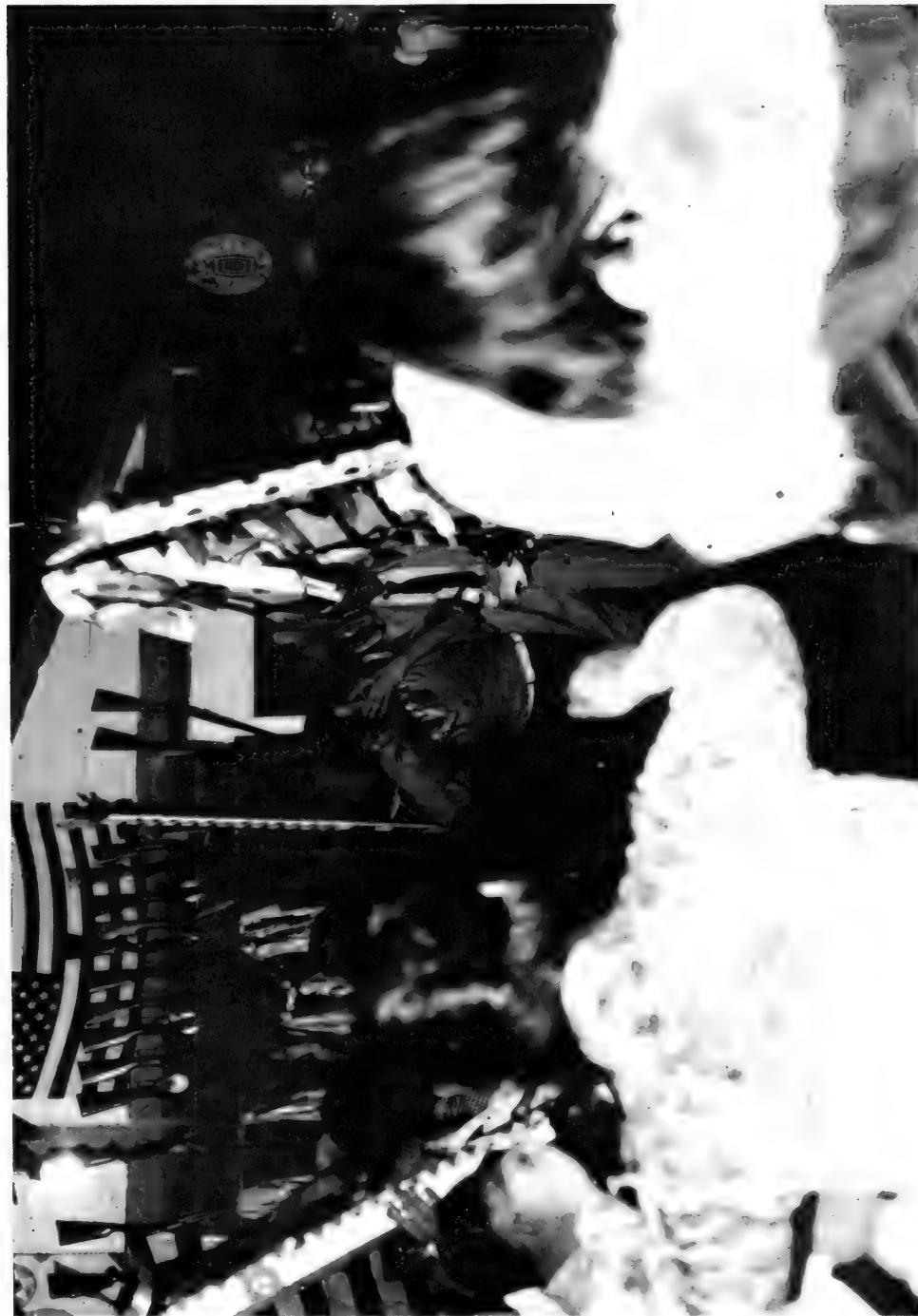


FIG. 7. Gunho dance at a Tanacross potlatch, 1973. Barely visible in the upper left hand corner is a potlatch sign painted by Julius Paul. A number of rifles with scarves attached hang in front of the American flag, and are to be given away at the potlatch. The people in this photograph are from several villages, including Mentasta, Tanacross, and Dot Lake. The striped gunho with ribbons at the right has been used at Tanacross since the late 1920s or early 1930s. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 8. Potlatch at Tanacross, 1981. This photograph was taken at the new Tanacross community hall. Old people have the seats of honor against the wall. They are served first and given the choicest pieces of meat and fish. Before the feast begins, large rolls of paper are laid down, places are set, and then the food is served from large pots by family members and friends of those giving the potlatch. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)

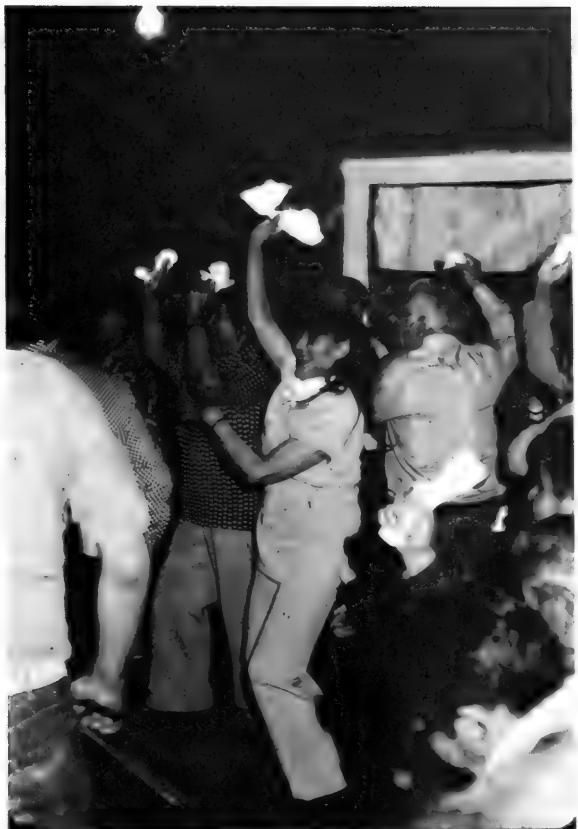


FIG. 9. Isabel John of Tanacross at a Tanacross potlatch, 1973. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 10. Harry John of Copper Center dancing at a Tanacross potlatch, 1981. In his hands he holds pieces of paper toweling, which are often held by both men and women when dancing (see fig. 9). Figures 9 and 10 illustrate examples of dance styles. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)

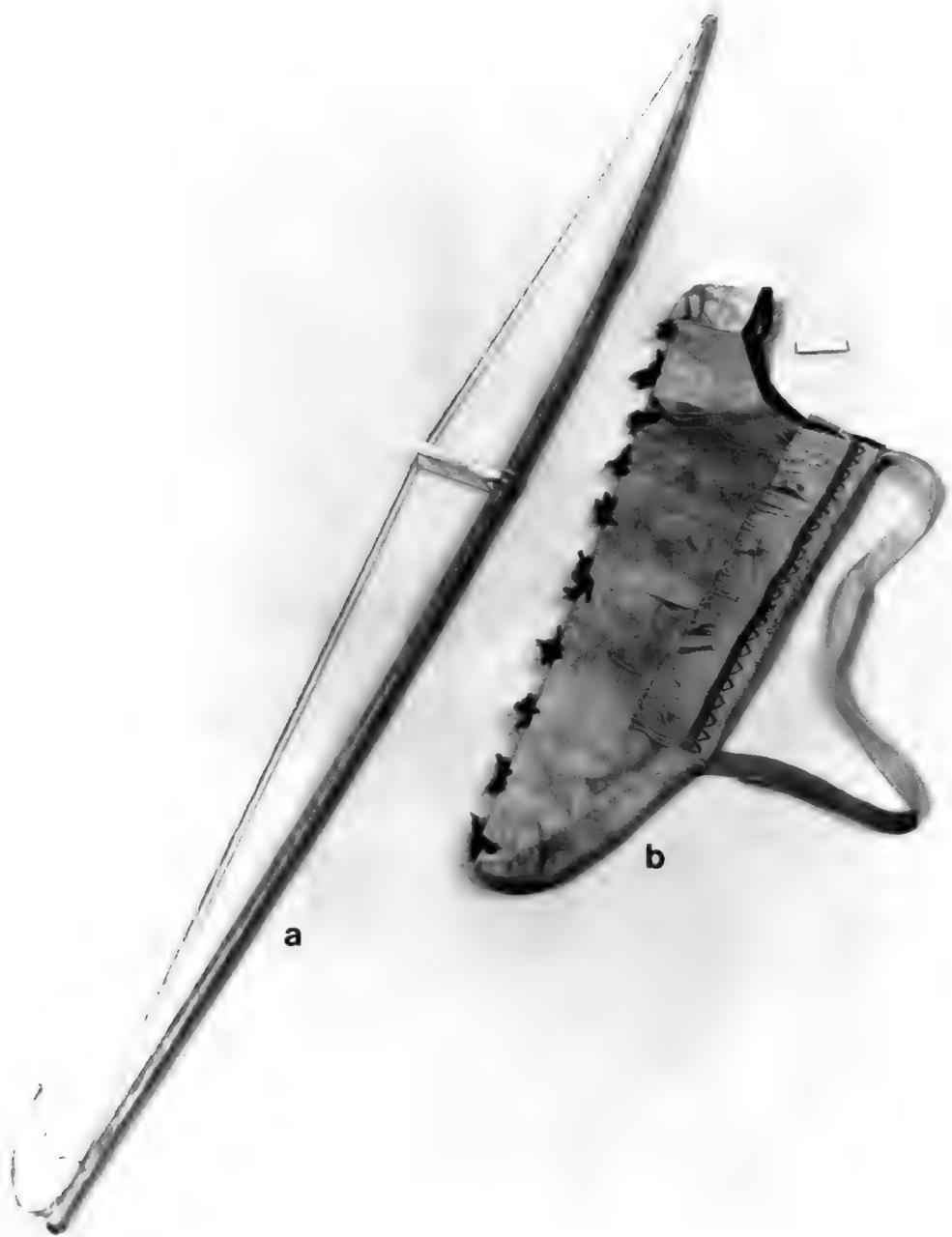


FIG. 11. **a**, bow (270107); **b**, quiver (270139).

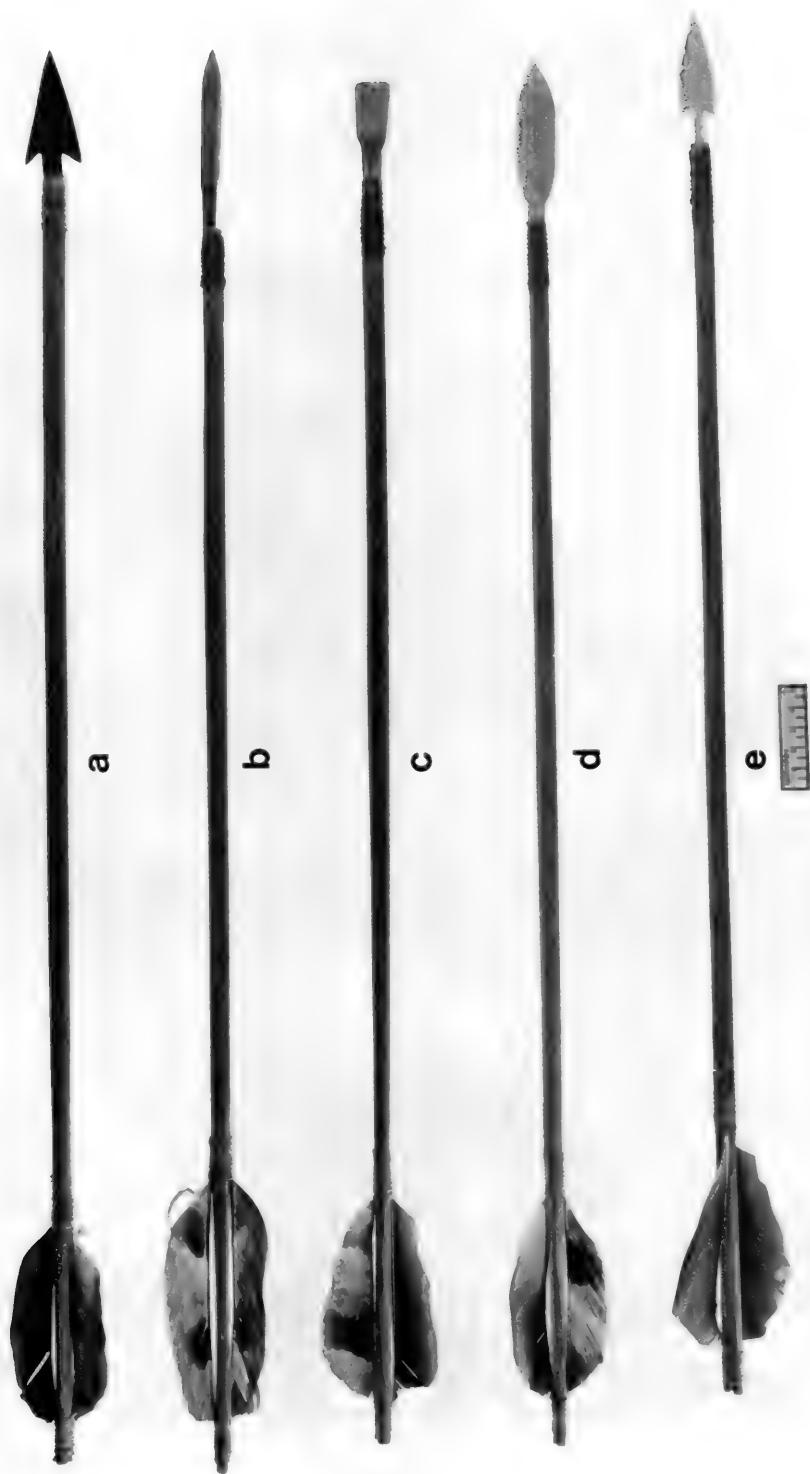


FIG. 1.2. **a**, arrow for large game (270108b); **b**, arrow for large game (270108e); **c**, arrow for birds or small game (270108d); **d**, arrow for large game (270108a); **e**, arrow for large game (270108c).



FIG. 13. Tanacross boys shooting arrows, about 1930. Bows were used by boys to shoot small game such as squirrels and rabbits. All the boys are dressed in western-style clothing, probably supplied by the missionaries. Note, however, that at least one boy wears skin summer boots decorated with buttons around the top. (Photograph by E. A. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)



FIG. 14. Old Paul and his family at Mansfield, about 1930. From the left are: Salina Joseph, Jessie David, two unidentified people, Martha Isaac, Old Paul (Martha Isaac's grandfather), Julia Paul, Silas Thomas, and Old Paul's son David. The two small boys on the right are Gaither Paul and Baily Paul. Old Paul is standing with a bow and quiver which appears to be decorated with beads and dentalium shells. The bow has the customary guard and burn marks indicating that it was fire-hardened. Note the jacket decorated with fur and buttons which is worn by Old Paul's wife. (Photograph by E. A. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)

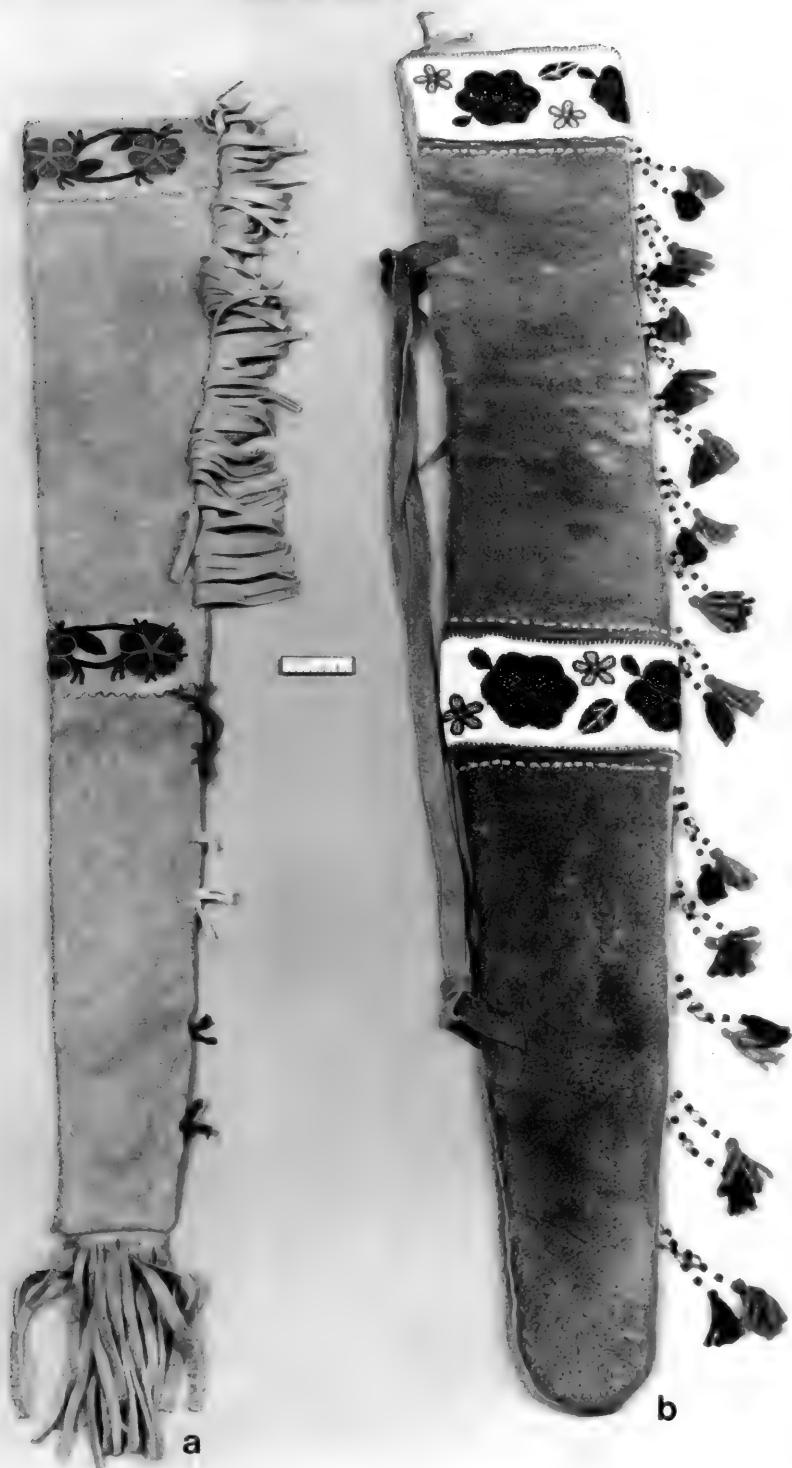


FIG. 15. **a**, gun case (270088); **b**, gun case (270123).



FIG. 16. Walter Isaac and two of his daughters at Tanacross, about 1930. Chief Walter, as he was known, is dressed for the hunt with skin gloves, pack, skin gun case, and shoe packs. The family is probably going to hunt caribou in the hills north of Tanacross. Note that women as well as men carried firearms and packs.  
(Photograph by E. A. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)

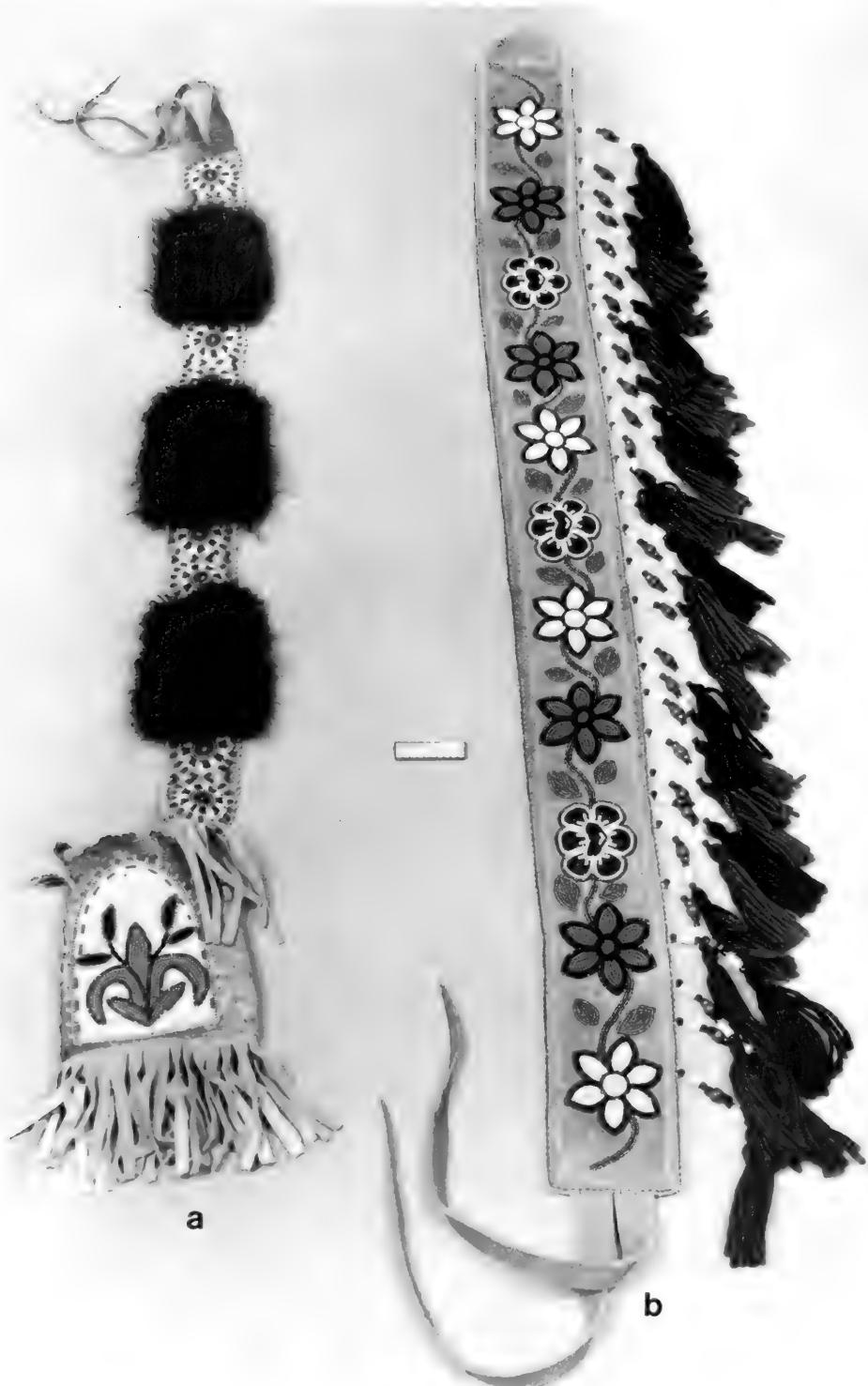


FIG. 17. **a**, rifle strap (270087); **b**, baby strap (270129).

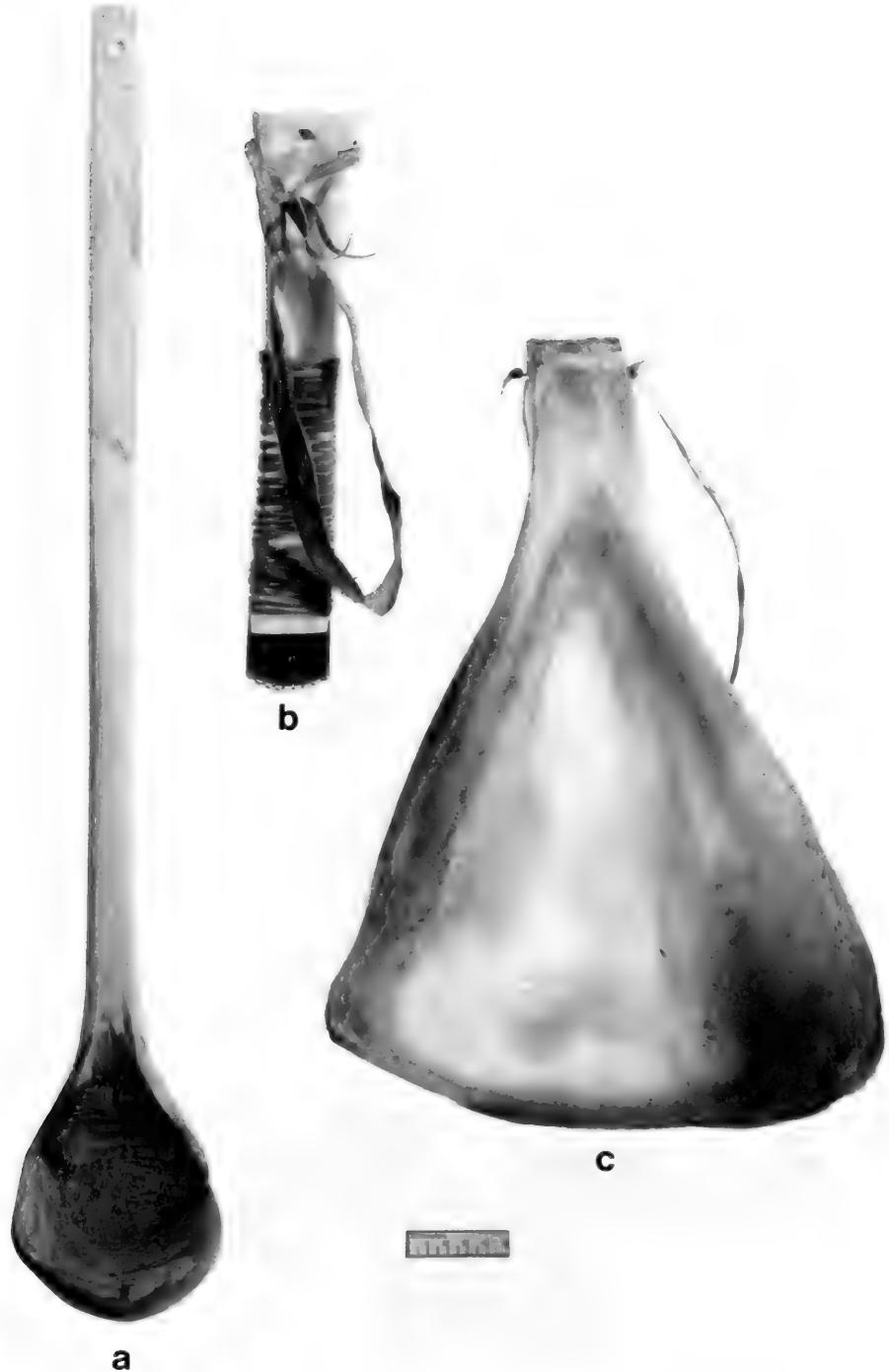


FIG. 18. a, spoon (270144); b, fleshtool (270102); c, moose call (270121).

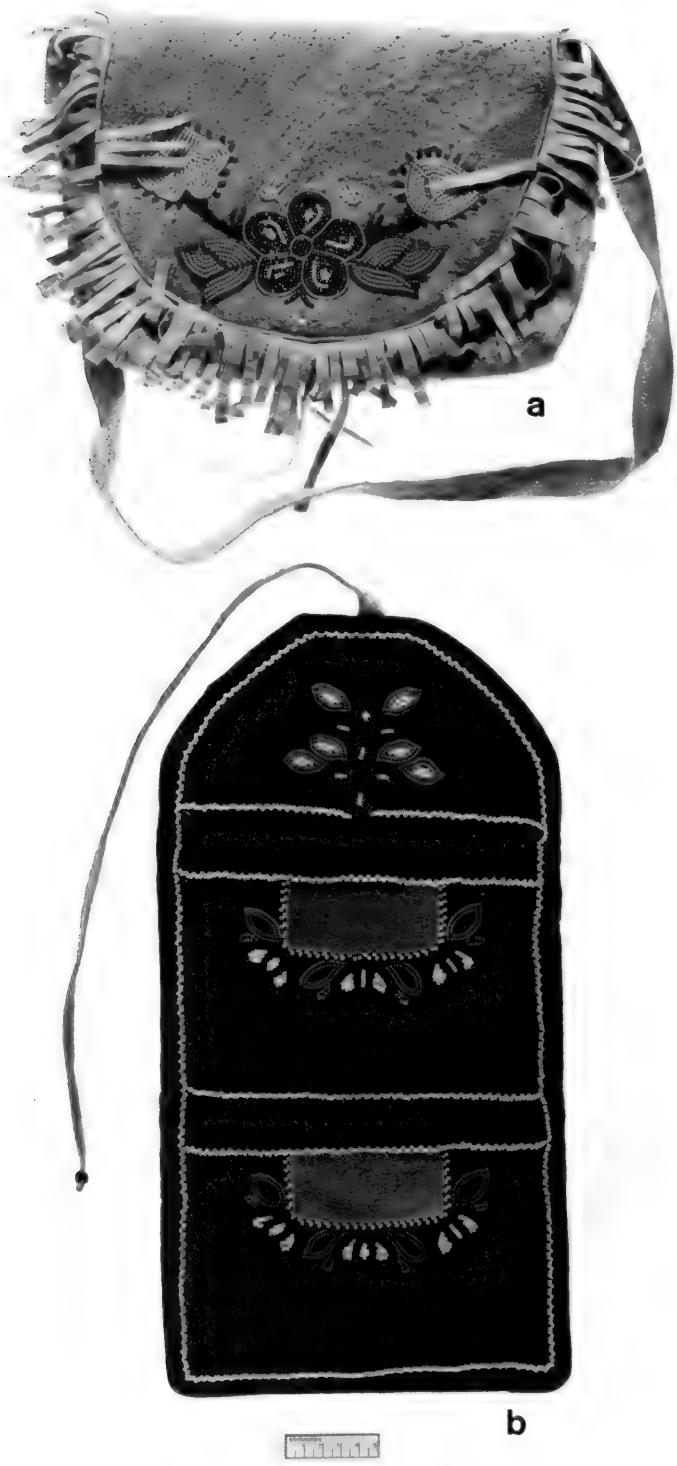


FIG. 19. a, shell bag (270089); b, sewing bag (270130).



FIG. 20. Dog packsack (270143).



FIG. 21a. Oscar Isaac of Tanacross packing a canvas dog pack, 1982.

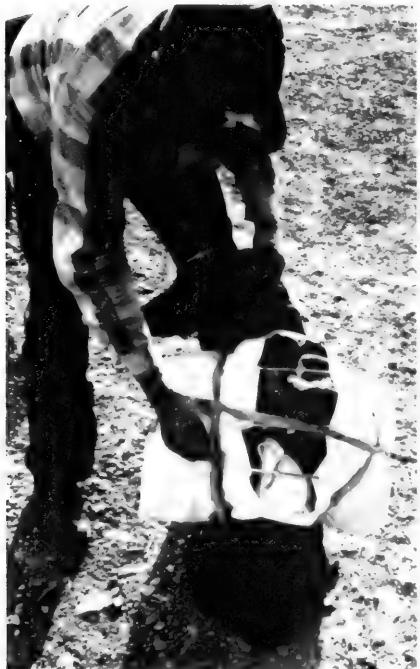
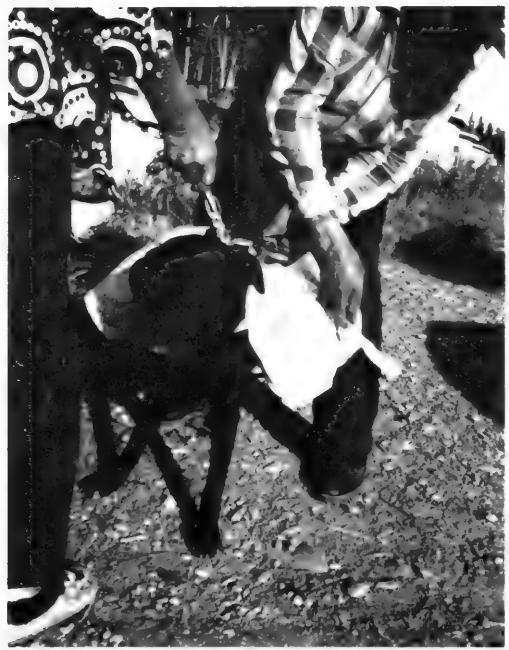


FIG. 21b-e. This series of photographs illustrates the sequences in packing a dog for the trail. (Photographs by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 22. Tanacross woman (foreground) with pack dog, ca. 1918–1920. The dog is probably carrying caribou meat in what appears to be a canvas pack similar to the one in the collection (fig. 20). The pack has been carefully balanced for the comfort of the dog. According to the caption on the back of this photograph, baby straps like the one worn by this woman were going out of style at the time and being replaced by commercially made scarves. Today scarves and straps have, for the most part, been replaced by commercially made baby carriers. (Photograph courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Church.)



FIG. 23. **a**, baby carrying cradle (270084); **b**, birch bark container (270090).



**b**



**a**

FIG. 24. **a**, birch bark container (270082); **b**, birch bark container (270083).



FIG. 25. a, birch bark container (270100); b, birch bark container (270099).

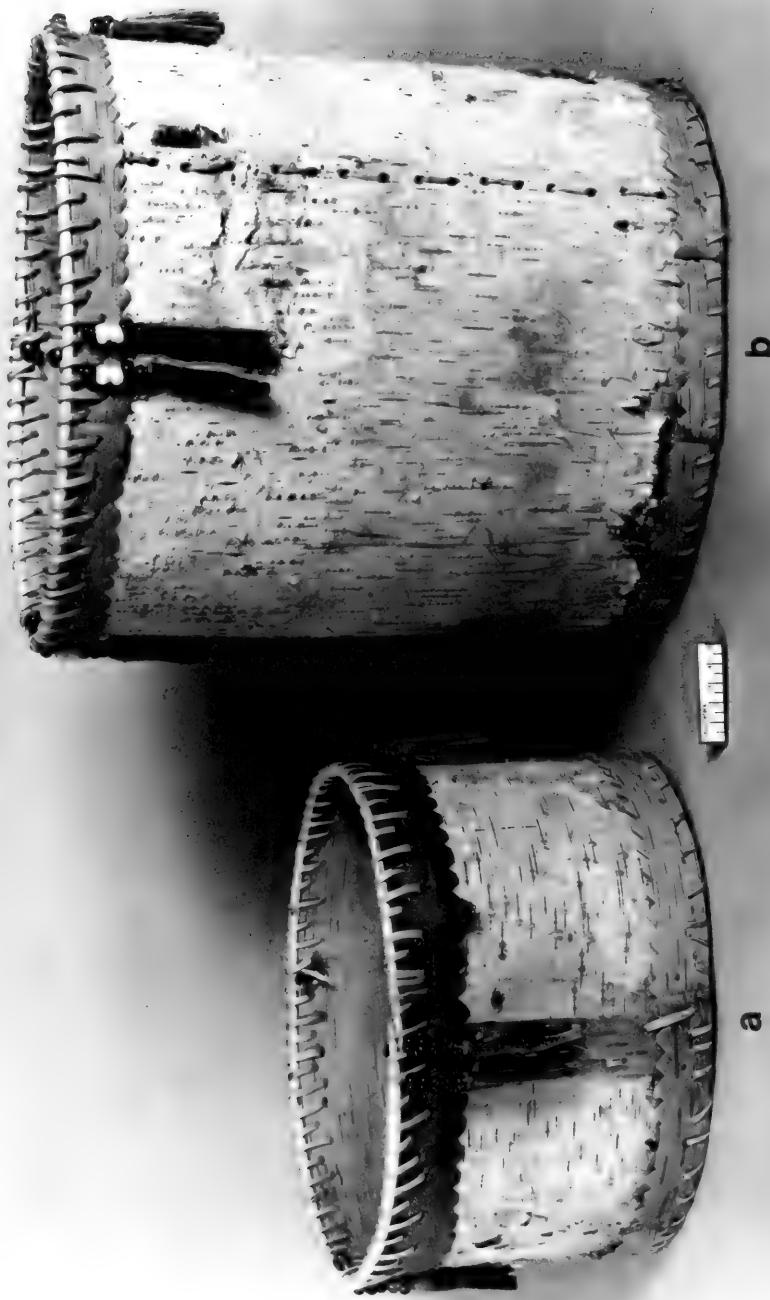


FIG. 26. **a**, birch bark container (270098); **b**, birch bark container (270099).



FIG. 27. Mrs. Annie Denny of Tanacross in her kitchen and work area, 1981. Mrs. Denny is a noted basket maker who contributed two of her baskets to the collection. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



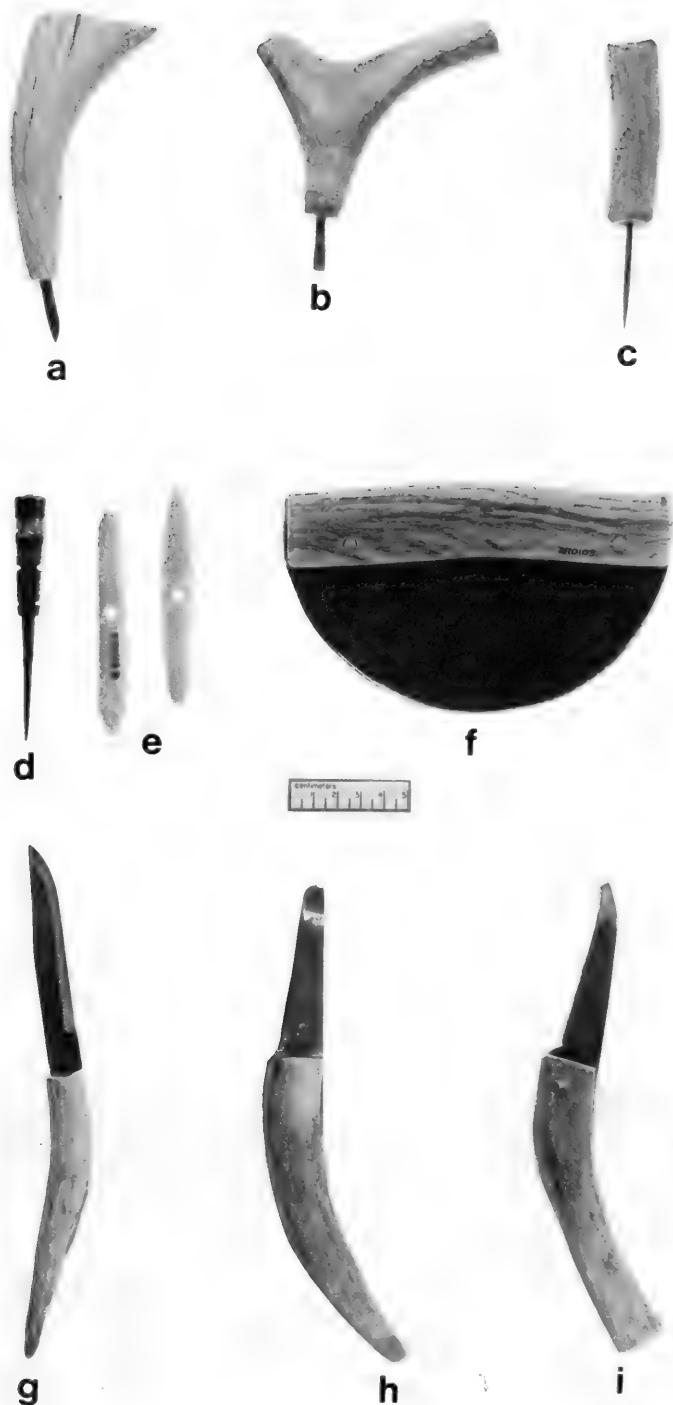


FIG. 28. **a**, snowshoe awl (270117); **b**, snowshoe awl (270114); **c**, sewing awl (270119); **d**, sewing awl (270104); **e**, netting needles (270118a-b); **f**, skin tanner (270103); **g**, straight-bladed knife (270120); **h**, crooked knife (270116); **i**, crooked knife (270115).



FIG. 29. Man's gauntlet mittens (270127a-b).



FIG. 30. Woman's gauntlet mittens (270128a-b).

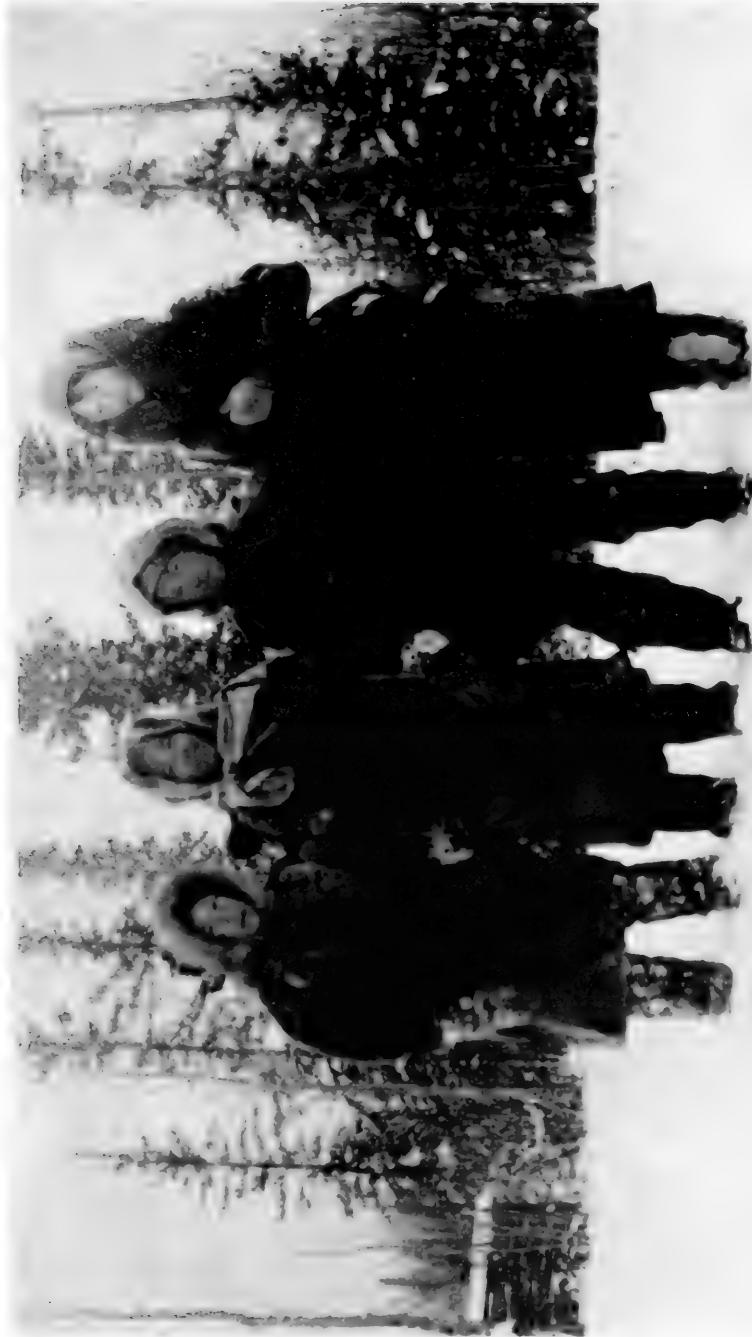


FIG. 31. From left to right are Isaac Isaac, two Charles boys, and the missionary's daughter, Ada McIntosh, at Tanacross, about 1930. The boys are wearing caribou skin pullovers with the hair on the outside and skin mittens. All the mittens have gauntlet cuffs, and two pairs are beaded. (Photograph by E. A. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)



FIG. 32. **a**, gloves (270113a-b); **b**, gloves (270101a-b).



FIG. 33. a, hat (270138); b, hat (270142).



FIG. 34. Winter boots (270131a-b; 270132a-b).

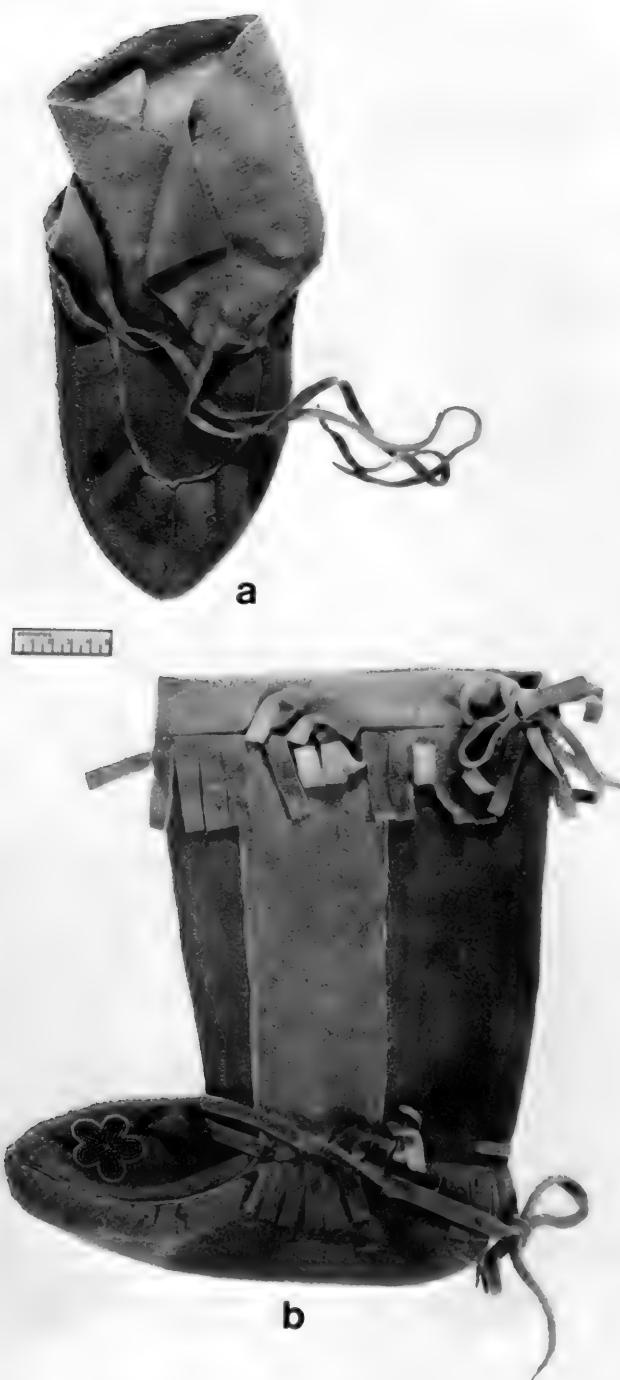
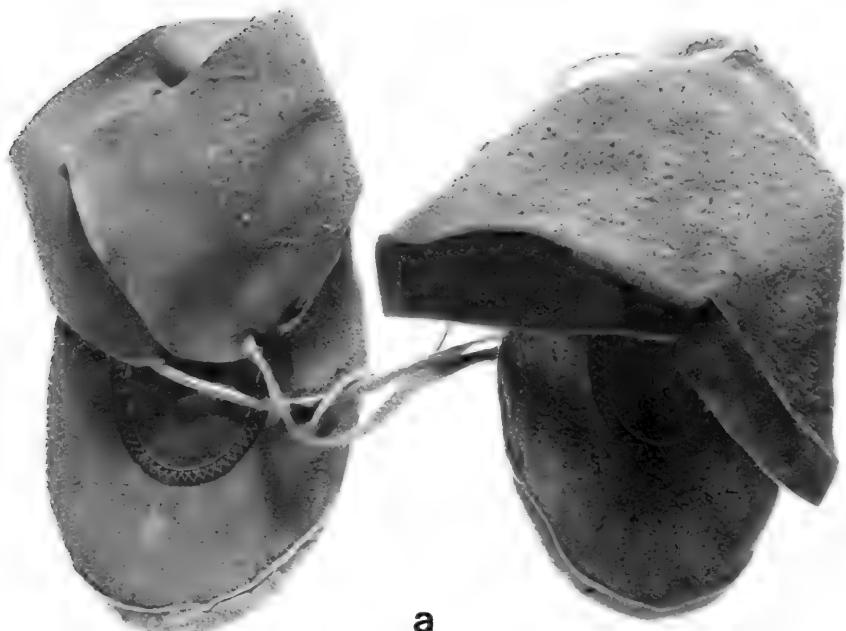


FIG. 35. **a**, moccasins (270126a-b); **b**, winter boots (270105a-b).



**a**



**b**

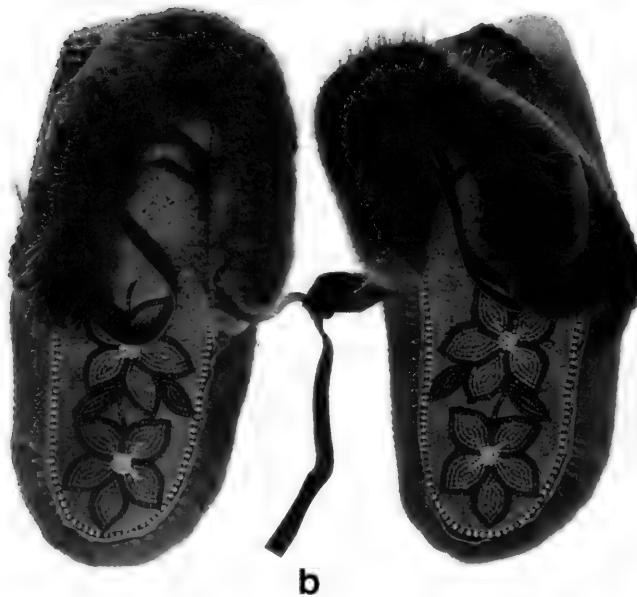
FIG. 36. **a**, moccasins (270125a-b); **b**, moccasins (270093a-b).



FIG. 37. Chief Alexander of Tolovana, ca. 1900–1910. The chief is dressed for an important occasion, such as a potlatch, in his skin chief's coat trimmed with beaver or otter fur and decorated with panels of beadwork sewn on cloth. Around his shoulder he is wearing a dentalium shell bandolier, from which is suspended a knife sheath decorated with dentalium shells. He is wearing moccasins of similar construction to a pair in the collection (fig. 36a). Of particular interest are the chief's trousers, with beaded trim around the cuff and along the seam. Note that the knife has a fluted handle. All this paraphernalia denotes the high social status of Alexander and indicates that he was a wealthy, generous, and knowledgeable leader of his people. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Church.)



a



b

FIG. 38. a, moccasins (270085a-b); b, moccasins (270097a-b).

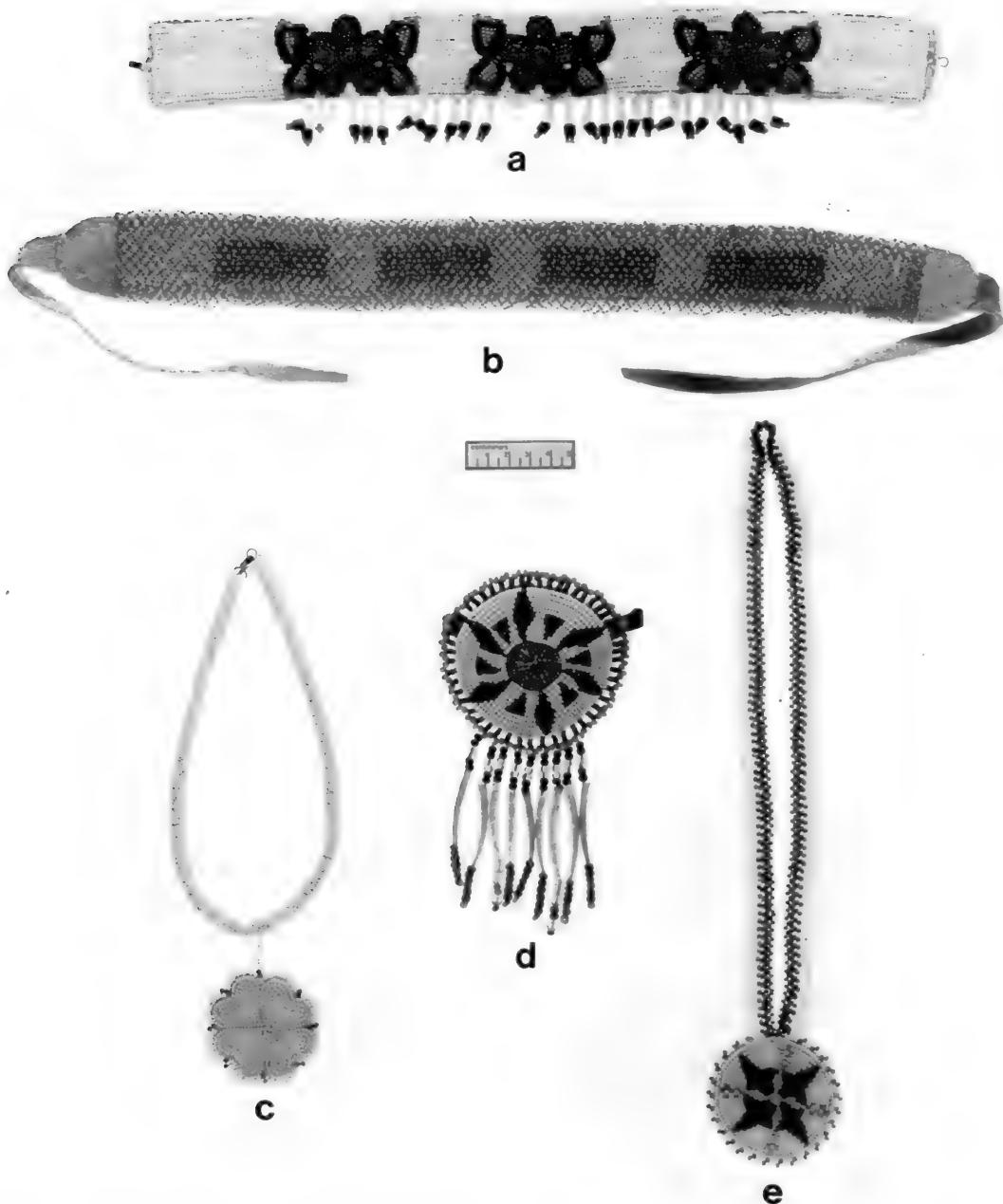


FIG. 39. **a**, choker (270096); **b**, headband (270133); **c**, choker (270095); **d**, hairpiece (270112); **e**, necklace (270094).



FIG. 40. Fort Yukon woman supporting her child on her back with a beaded baby strap, about 1920. Such straps were common among Athapaskans in Alaska and western Canada, though beadwork styles varied. The style shown in this photograph is quite different than that practiced on the upper Tanana River. Note the tassels of beads and wool, a common feature of most baby straps. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Church.)

FIG. 41. Chief Isaac of Dot Lake, 1981. Like Chief Alexander's dress (fig. 37), Chief Isaac's regalia denotes his social status and that of his ancestors. He wears two beaded bandoliers, to indicate his descent from important people and the fact that he has inherited their prestige. The bandoliers are trimmed with pendants made of dentalium shells and tufts of beaver fur or yarn. Underneath the bandoliers he wears a skin vest, made of commercially tanned skin by his wife, Maggie, and decorated with cloth trim and beaded rosettes. Around his neck Chief Andrew wears a necklace made of glass and bone beads and a shell disk. A necklace with a hanging pendant signifies wealthy ancestors and also attests to his own wealth. The two eagle feathers in his headband indicate that both sides of his family were rich. Chief Andrew's costume reflects a variety of influences, for some of the objects he wears were obtained on his travels throughout the United States as a representative of his people in land claims negotiations. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 42. Steven Northway (wearing the headband) and Joe Joseph of Tanacross, 1972. For dancing at a potlatch many men wear headbands, made either of moose skin or beads. Typically, Steven Northway wears the feathers at the front instead of the back. Sewn to the sleeve of his shirt is a patch with his initials and the name "Northway Dancers," the village dance group to which he belongs. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



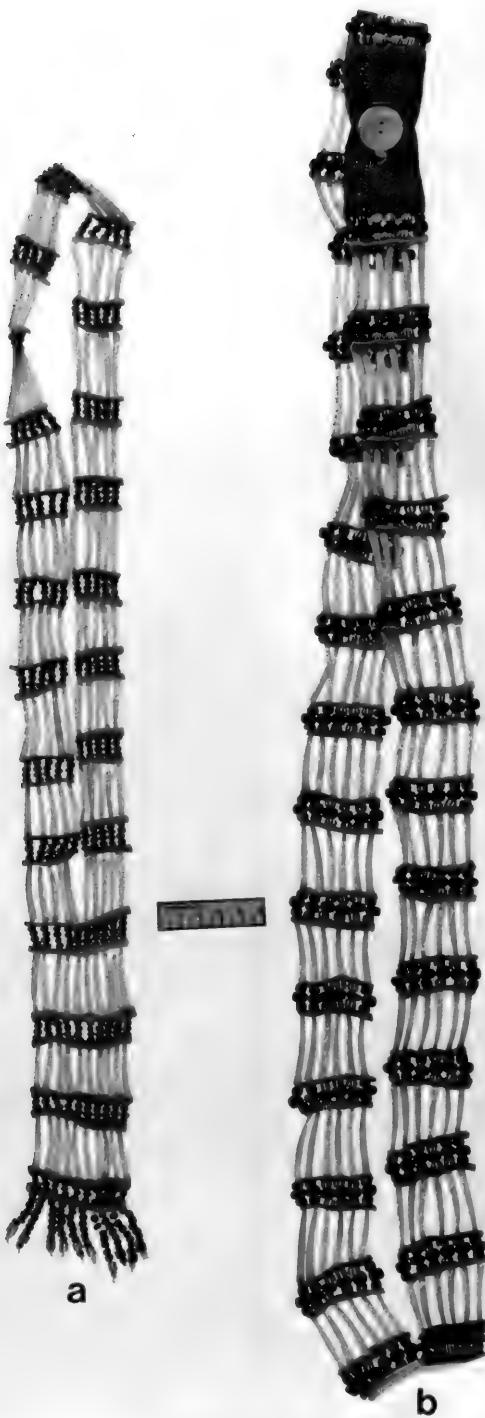


FIG. 43. **a**, necklace (270135); **b**, bandolier (270136).



FIG. 44. This photograph, possibly taken in the 1920s, shows two different styles of dentalium shell necklaces and earrings. Both styles of necklaces continue to be made today, although the collar style is the only one actually worn. Earrings are still made but seldom worn, never by men. Dentalium shells have retained their importance as indicators of wealth and status; the wider a necklace, the more status attached to the wearer. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Tom Serton.)



FIG. 45. Charlie James of Tanacross, 1981. The day this photograph was taken Charlie James was preparing for a potlatch. He wears a moose skin vest, dentalium shell necklace, beaded headband, dentalium shell bandolier, and beaded sash. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 46. a, sash (270086); b, knife sheath with button sash (270137).

FIG. 47. Chief's coat, front (27014).





FIG. 48. Chief's coat, back (270141).



FIG. 49. Chief's coat, front (270140).



FIG. 50. Chief's coat, back (270140).

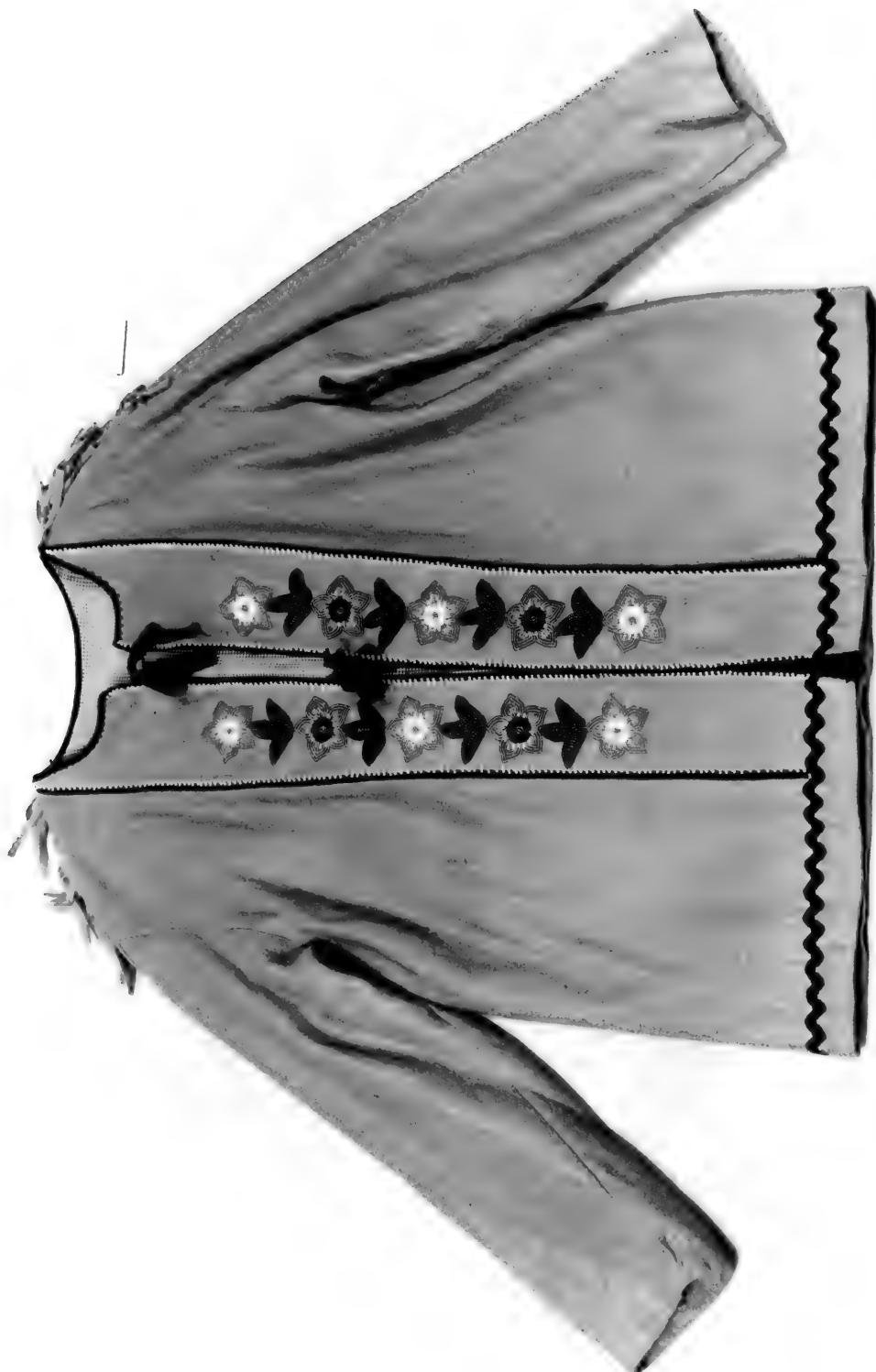


FIG. 51. Chief's coat, front (270122).

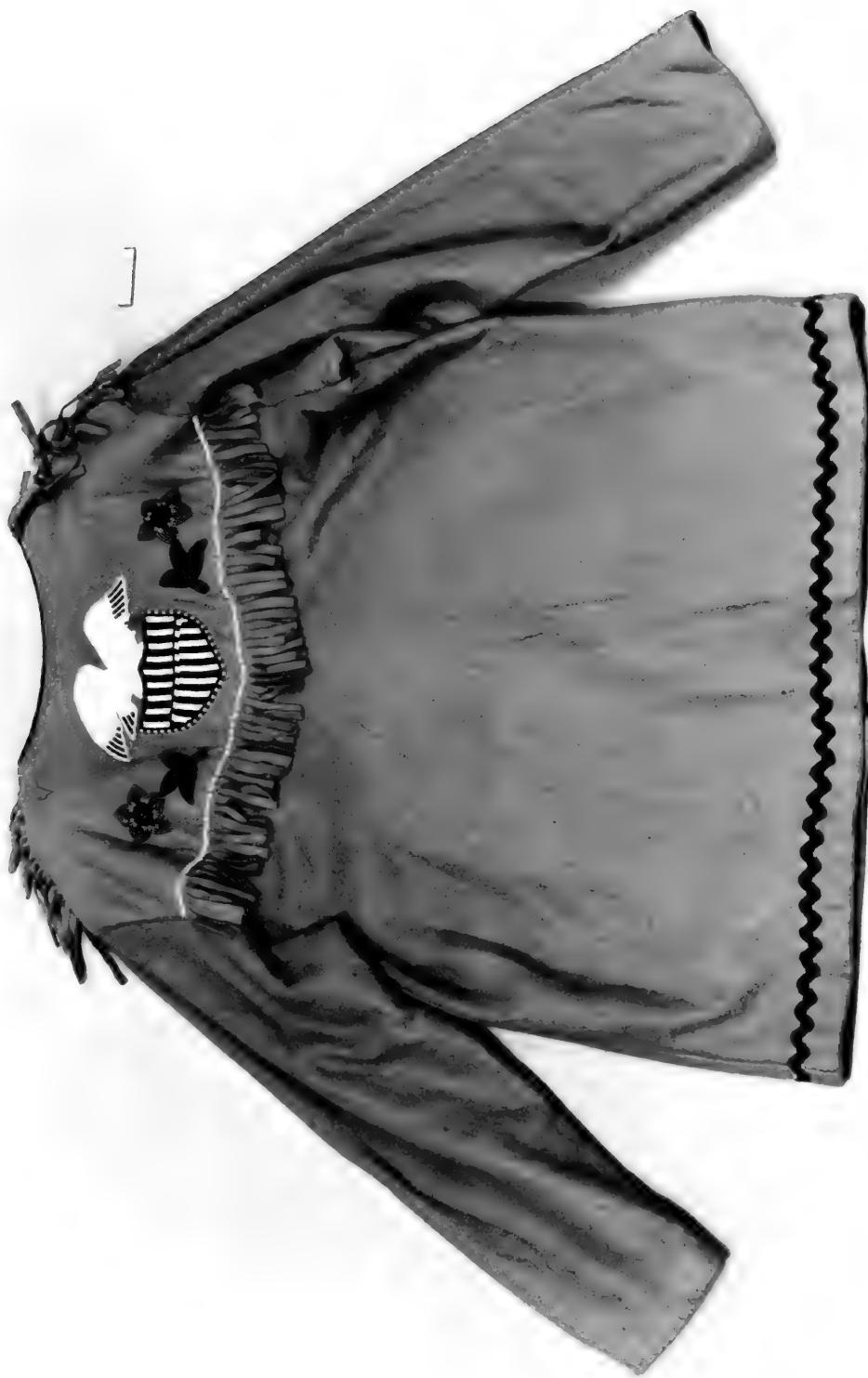


FIG. 52. Chief's coat, back (270122).



FIG. 53. "Some of the men at Tanana Crossing dressed in their best," 1926. From the left are: Silas Henry, Big Albert, Tommy John, David Paul, Sam Thomas, Walter Isaac, unidentified man, and Big Frank. Silas Henry holds a gunho which also appears on the left in Figure 7. Note the great variety of chief's coats and decorative materials. Silas Henry's coat is unusual because of the cape at the shoulders. The coats worn by the two men on the right are considered traditional or "old time" styles because they are made of skin and decorated in a more traditional fashion. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Church.)



FIG. 54. Emma Jonathan of Tanacross wearing a contemporary chief's coat, 1982. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)

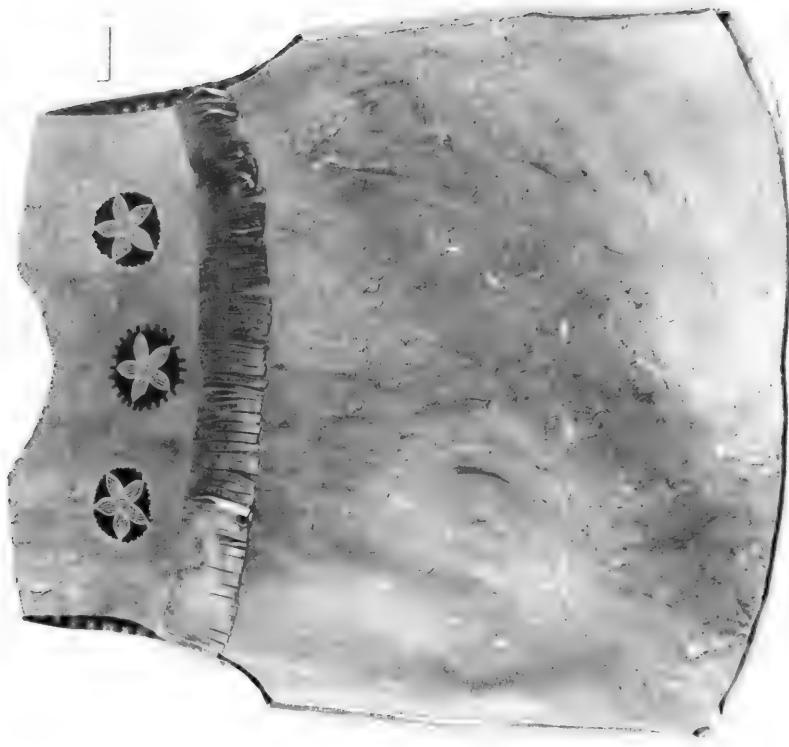


FIG. 56. Vest, back (270134).

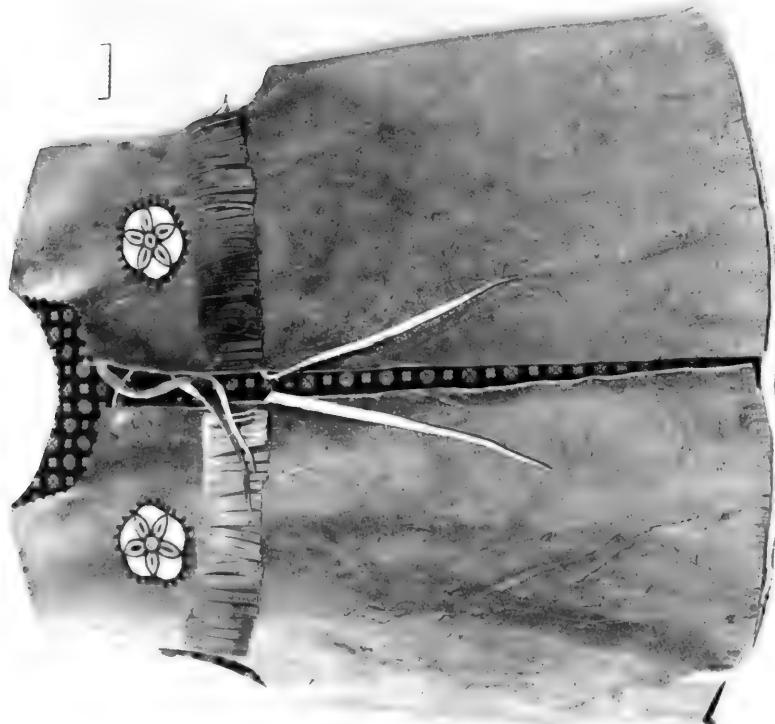


FIG. 55. Vest, front (270134).



FIG. 57. Julius Paul of Tanacross wearing his potlatch clothing, 1978. For this photograph, Mr. Paul dressed up and insisted that he also hold a rifle. The vest is made of smoke-tanned moose skin and the necklace of Japanese dentalium shells and glass beads. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 58. Dance shirt, front (270092).



FIG. 59. Dance shirt, back (270092).



FIG. 60. Northway children dancing at Chief Walter Northway's birthday party, 1981. All the children are wearing yellow cloth dance shirts decorated with black cloth fringes and beaded crests indicating clans of the village, Seagull and Crow. Some children wear moccasins and beaded headbands and store-bought feathers. These costumes, with their fringed yokes, recall the traditional style of skin shirt worn at the time of historic contact. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)

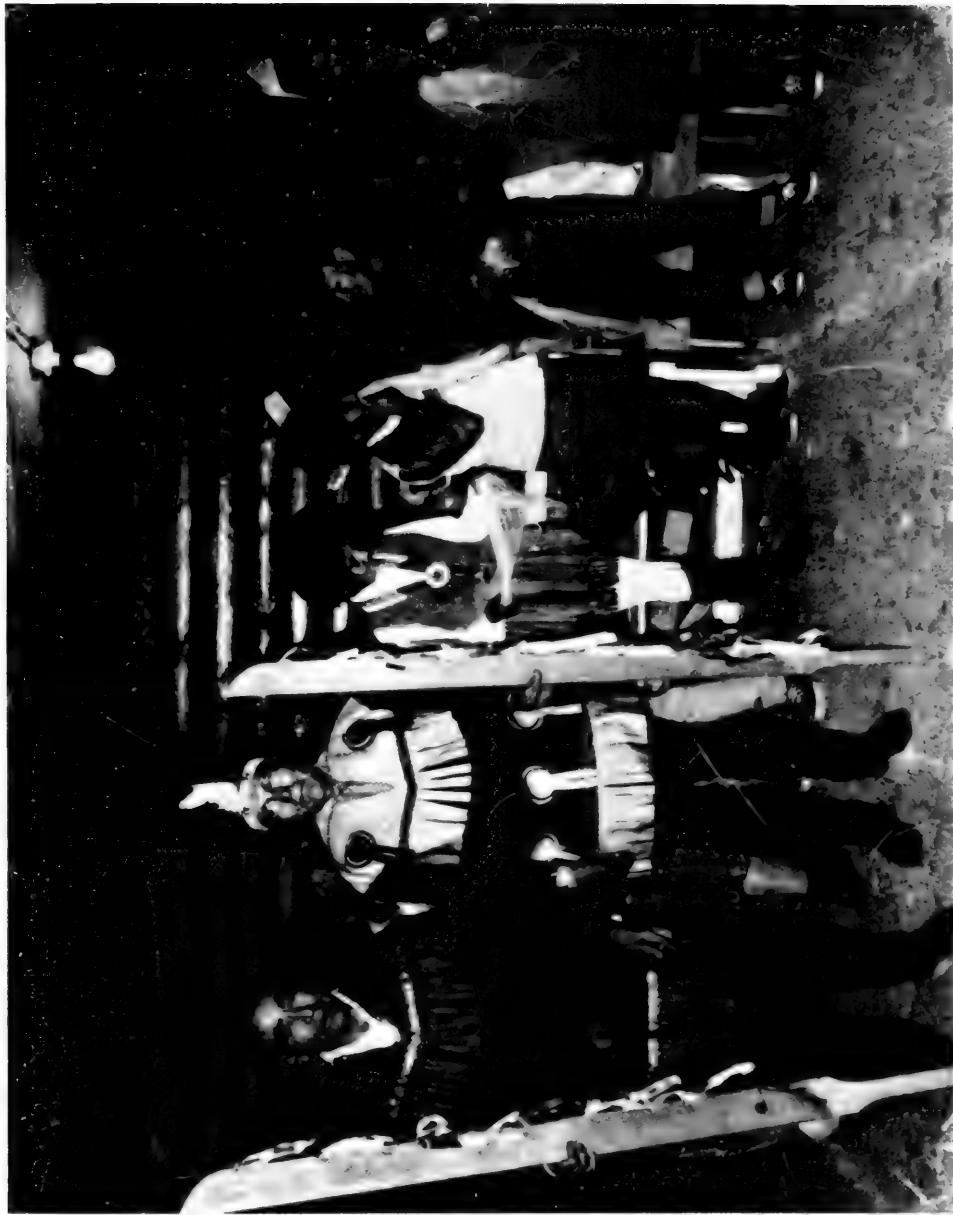


FIG. 61. Oscar Isaac (left) and Steven Northway at a Tétlin potlatch, late 1960s. Mr. Northway wears a cloth dance shirt almost identical to the one in the collection (figs. 58-59); both men hold gunhos. The hole in the stick is for the dancer's thumb. The women at the right are Dorothy Titus, Ada Gallon, Helen David, and Ena Albert; all hold dance scarves. Note the potlatch sign in the form of a Hudson's Bay blanket hanging in the back at the left. (Photograph by Ellen Thomas.)

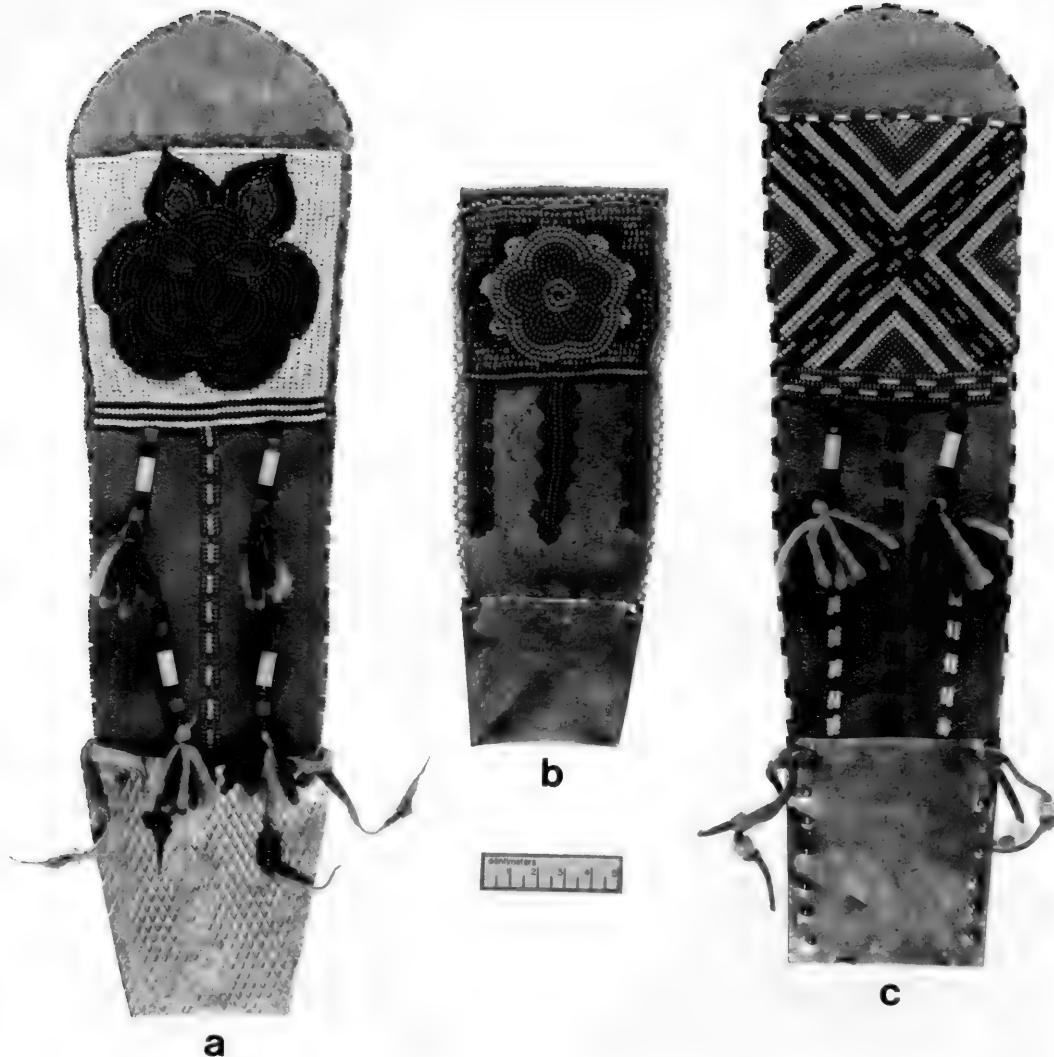


FIG. 62. a, knife sheath (270110); b, knife sheath (270109); c, knife sheath (270111).



FIG. 63. Old Paul of Tanacross, about 1930. Old Paul wears his Sunday suit with a dentalium shell bandolier and necklace. The knife case at the end of the bandolier is decorated with dentalium shells and glass beads and has a metal end like those in the collection (fig. 62a-c). (Photograph by A. E. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)

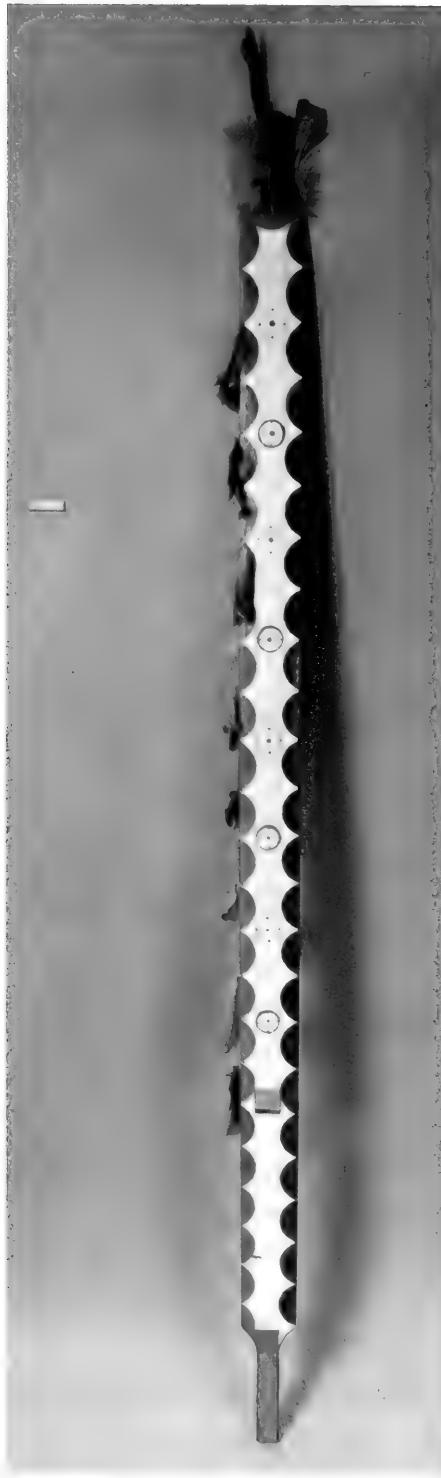


FIG. 64. Gunho (270124).



FIG. 65. Potlatch at Tanacross, 1972. This photograph shows a number of gunhos, or dance sticks, in use. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)



FIG. 66. Tanacross people, about 1920(?). The designs on the gunho are very different from those seen on gunhos in other historical photographs. Note the face and the zigzag which looks like an M and probably stands for the M of Mansfield village. What appears to be a feather duster is fastened to the top of the gunho. Feather dusters were popular for dancing in the 1920s. (Photograph by A. E. McIntosh, reproduced courtesy of Gaither Paul.)



FIG. 67. Potlatch at Eagle, 1907. Two men in this photograph wear gauntlet gloves and others are holding dance feathers, which people still use today. Note the gunho decorated with two Canadian and two American flags. (Photograph courtesy of the Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives.)



FIG. 68. Charlie David of Tetlin at a Tetlin potlatch, July 1981. He is leading a dance song with a moose skin drum. A person in the right foreground is dancing with a scarf while those on the left are visiting. During the afternoon, when this photograph was taken, a potlatch is very unstructured and people do what they want—dance, eat, or sleep. Note the potlatch sign in the form of a striped Hudson's Bay blanket hanging on the wall. (Photograph by William E. Simeone.)

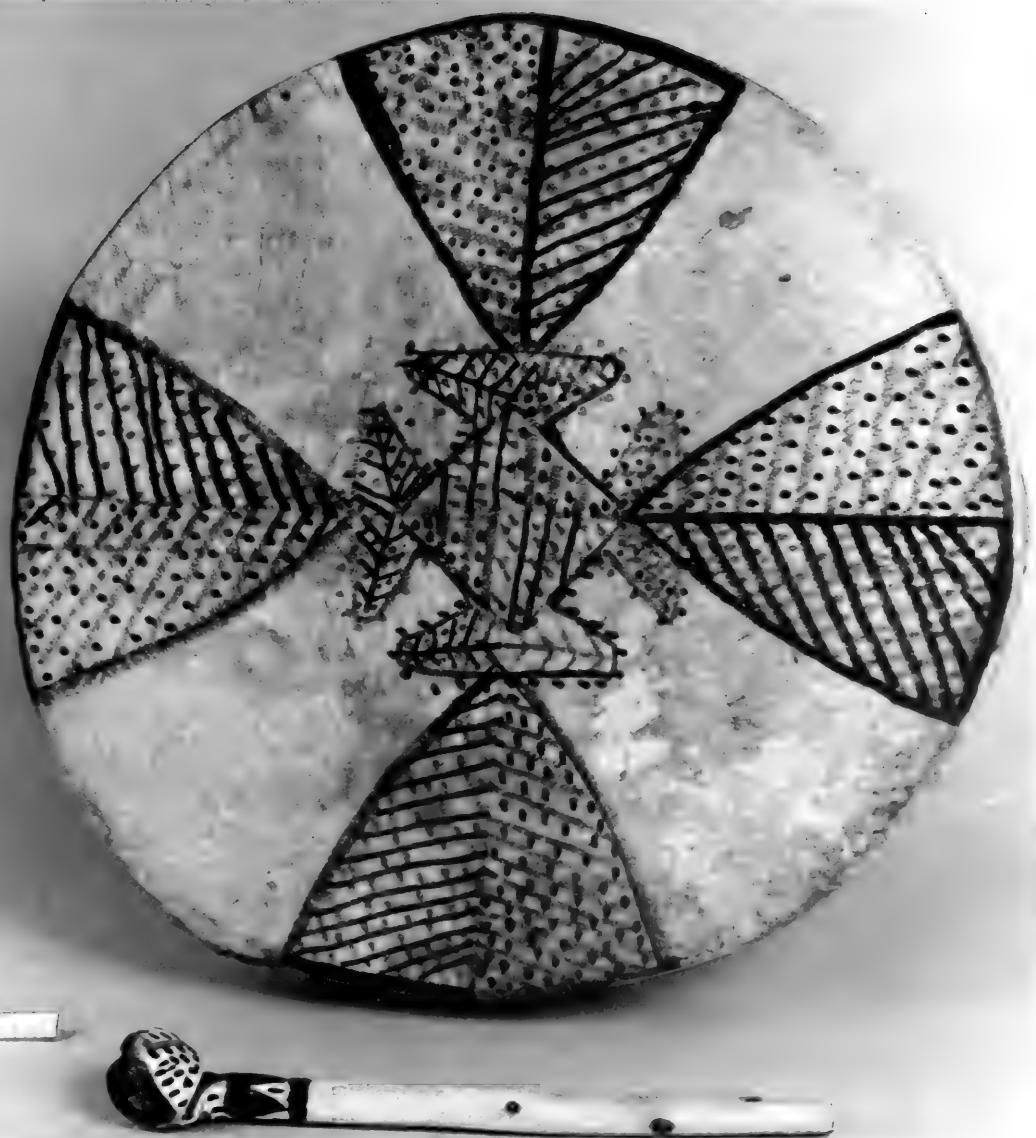


FIG. 69. Drum (front) and stick (270081a-b).

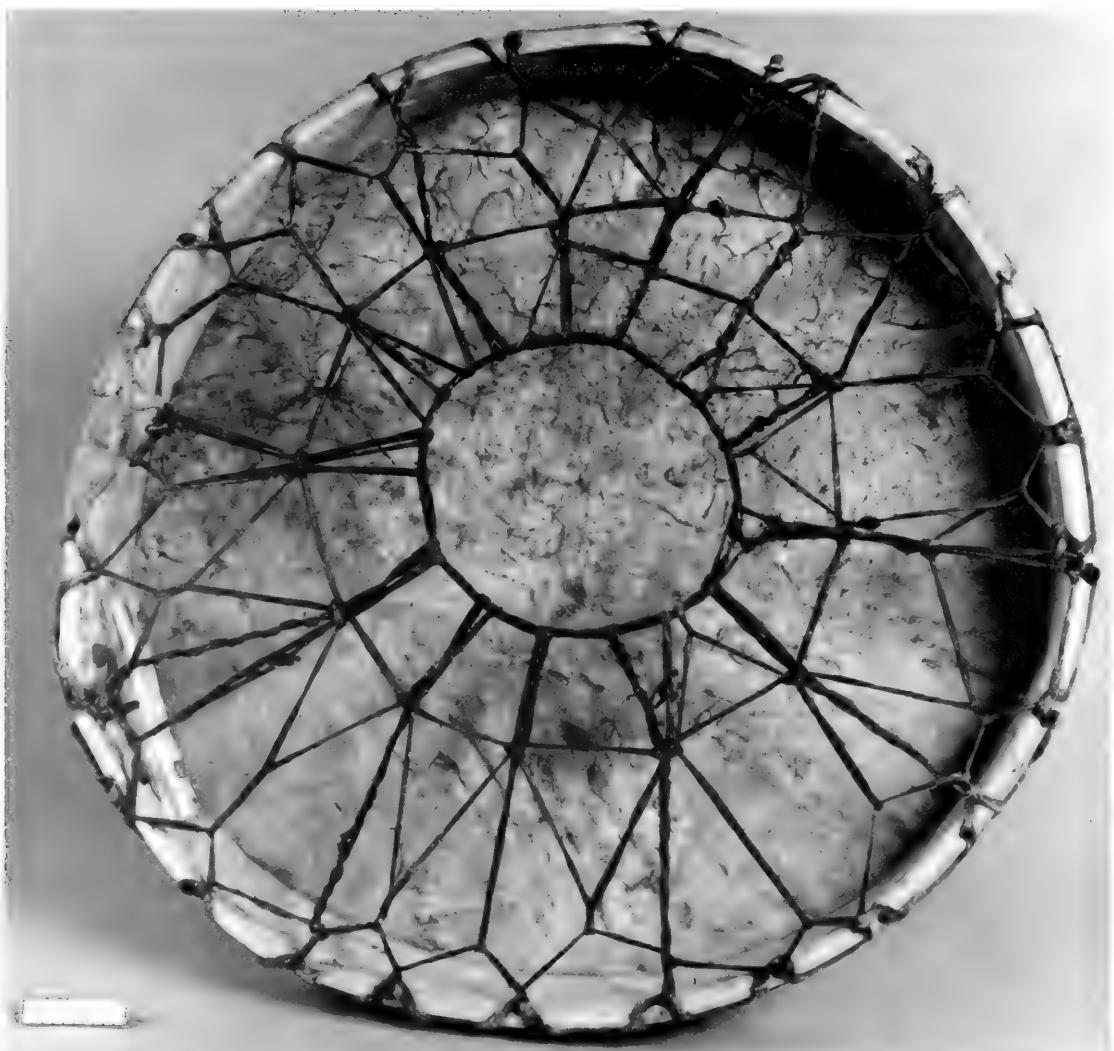


FIG. 70. Drum, back (270081a).

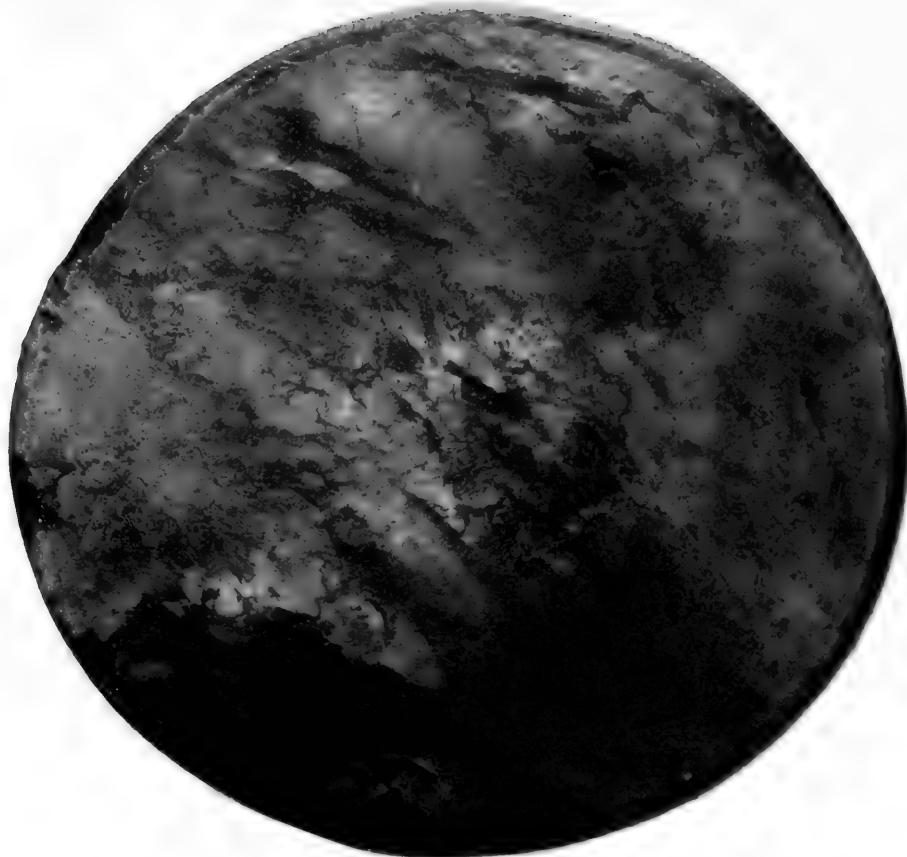


FIG. 71. Drum (front) and two sticks (270106a-c).



FIG. 72. Drum (back) and two sticks (270106a-c).





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